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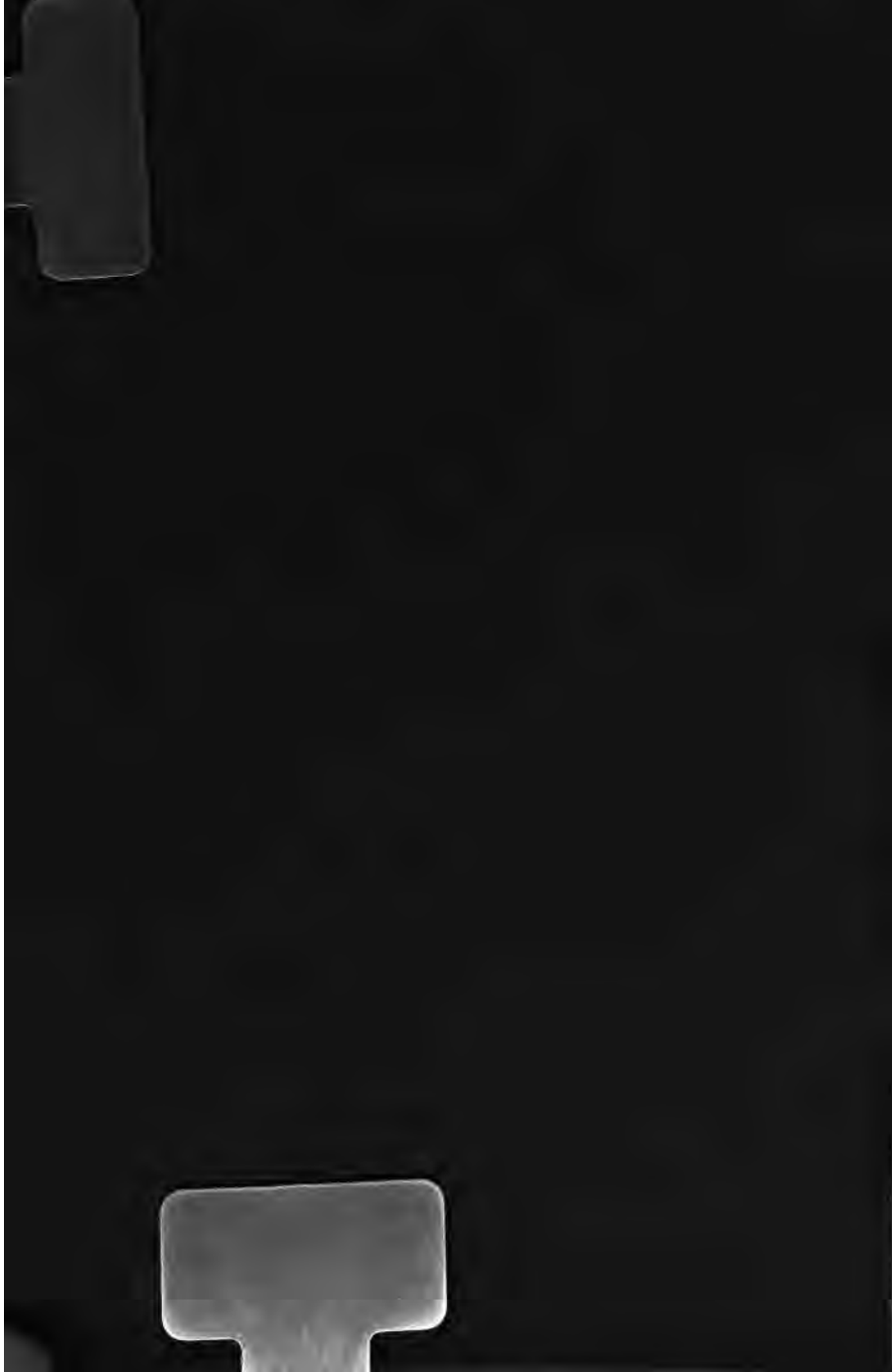
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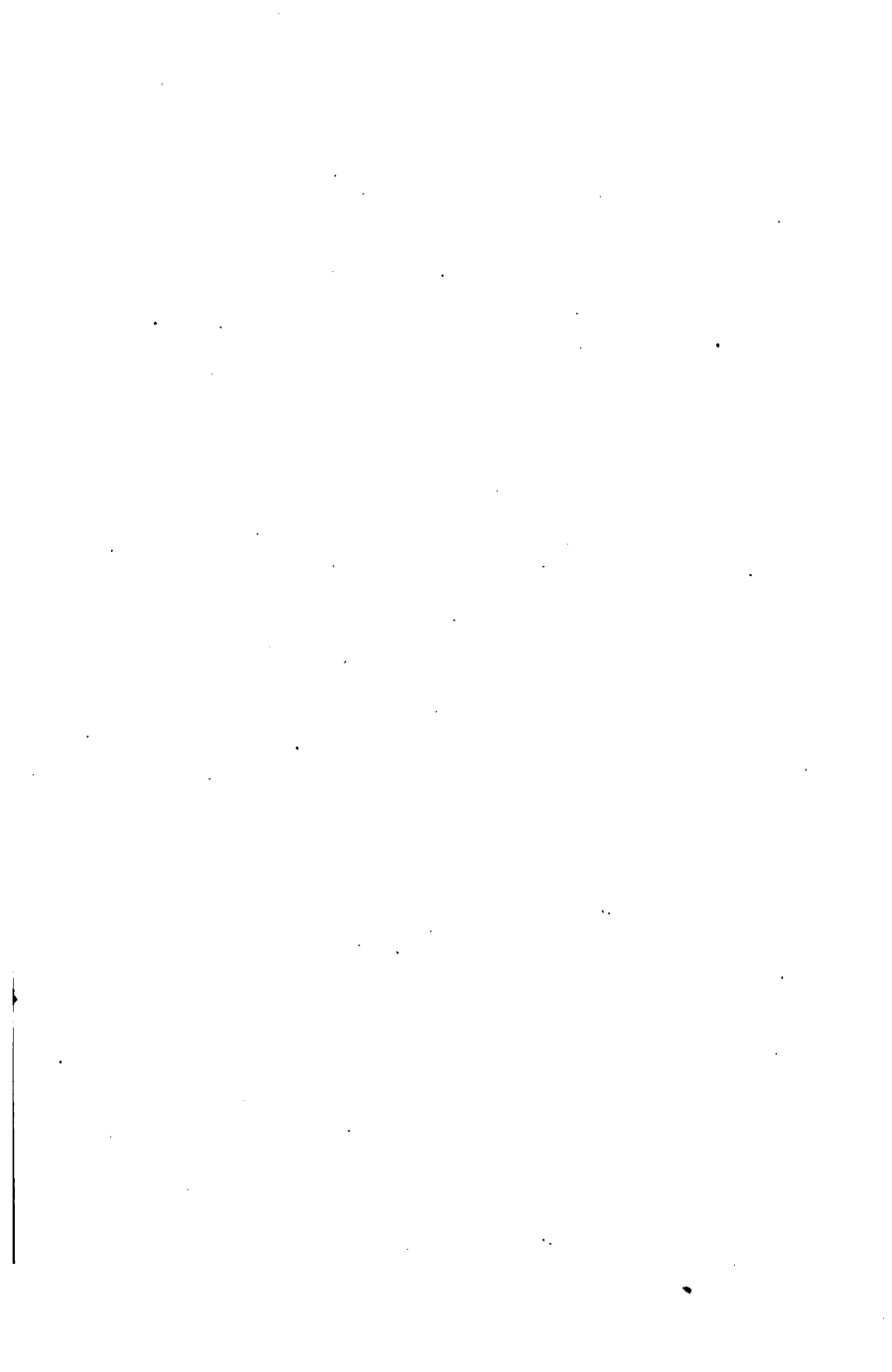
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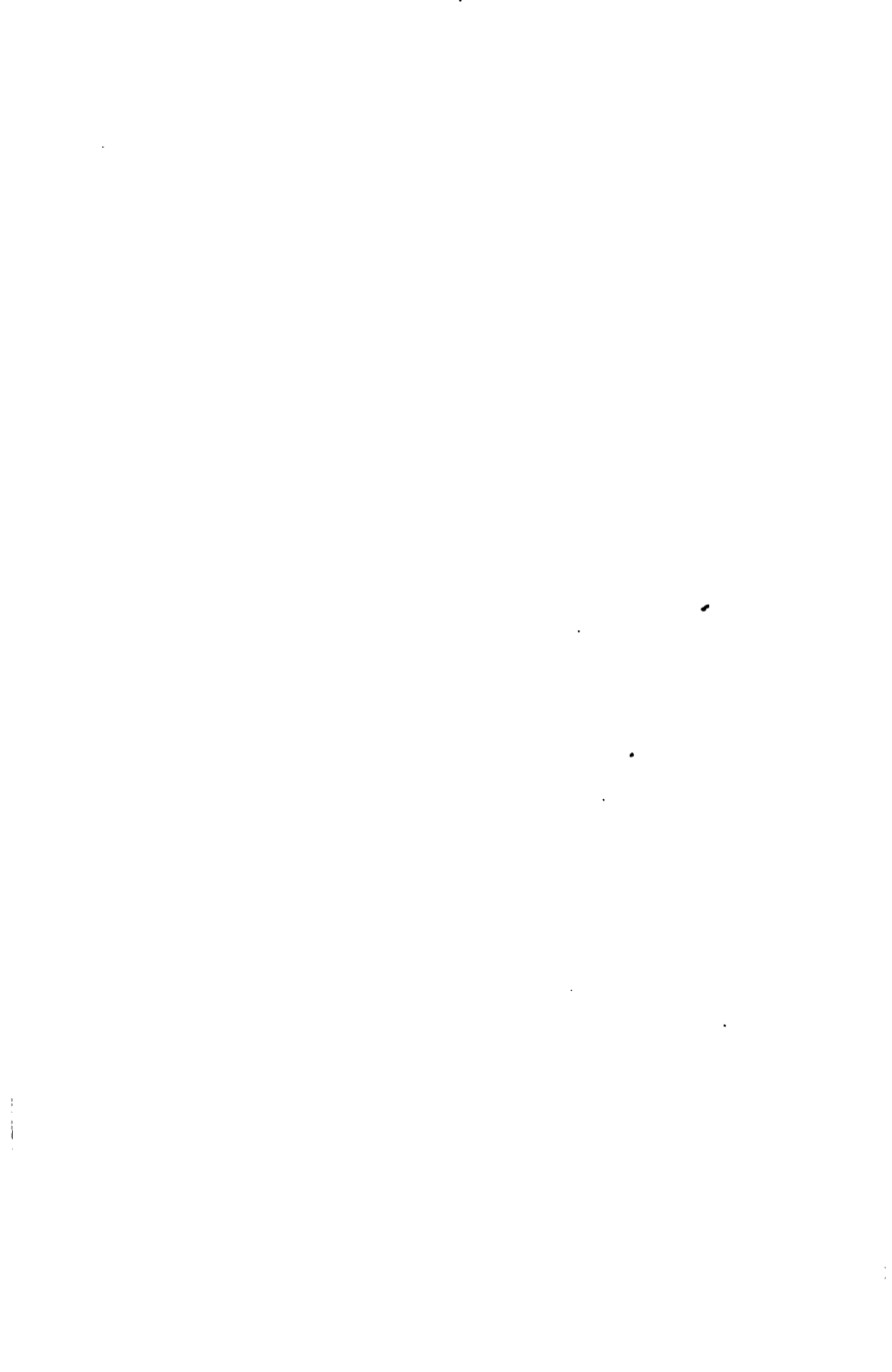
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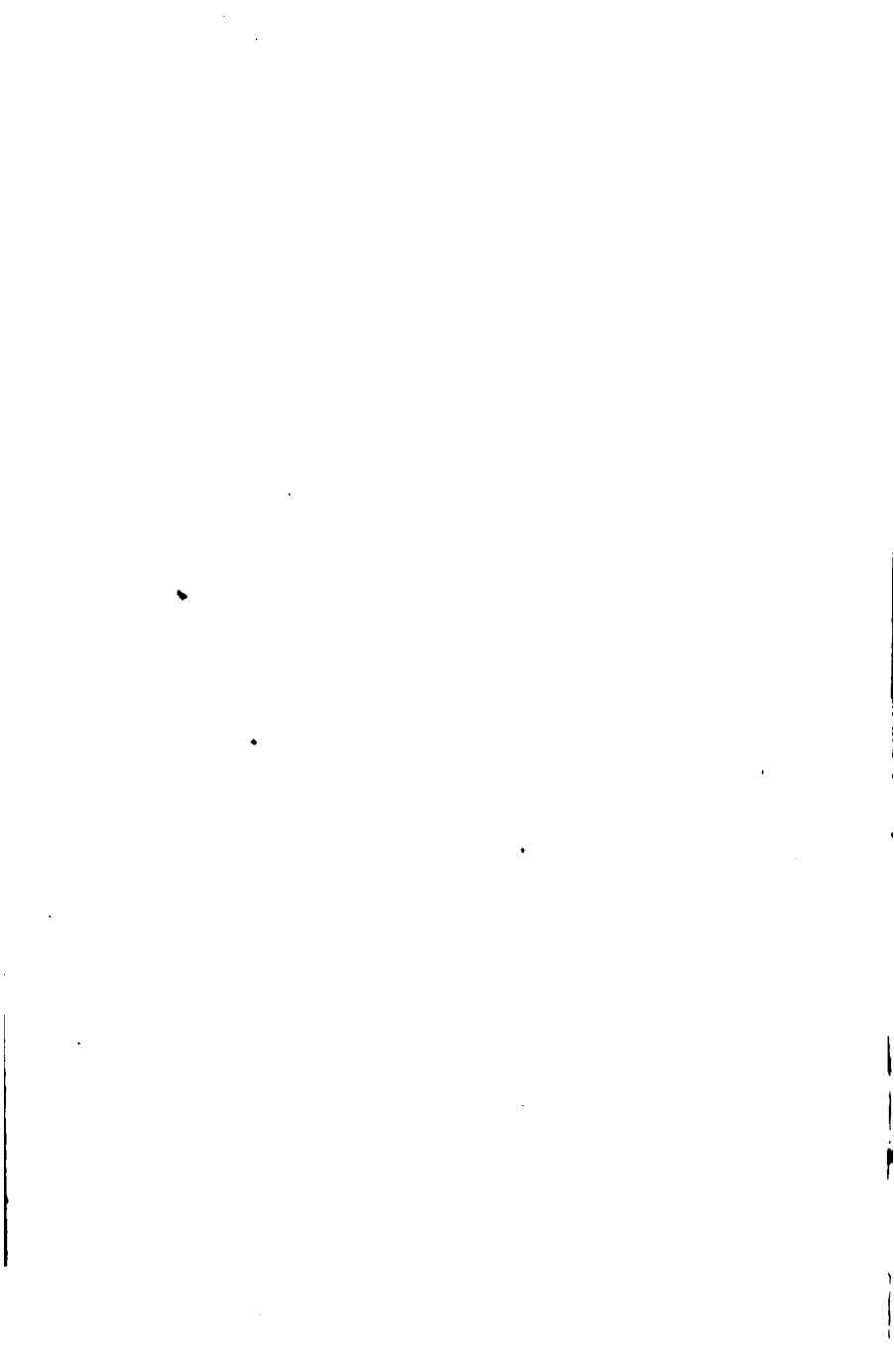
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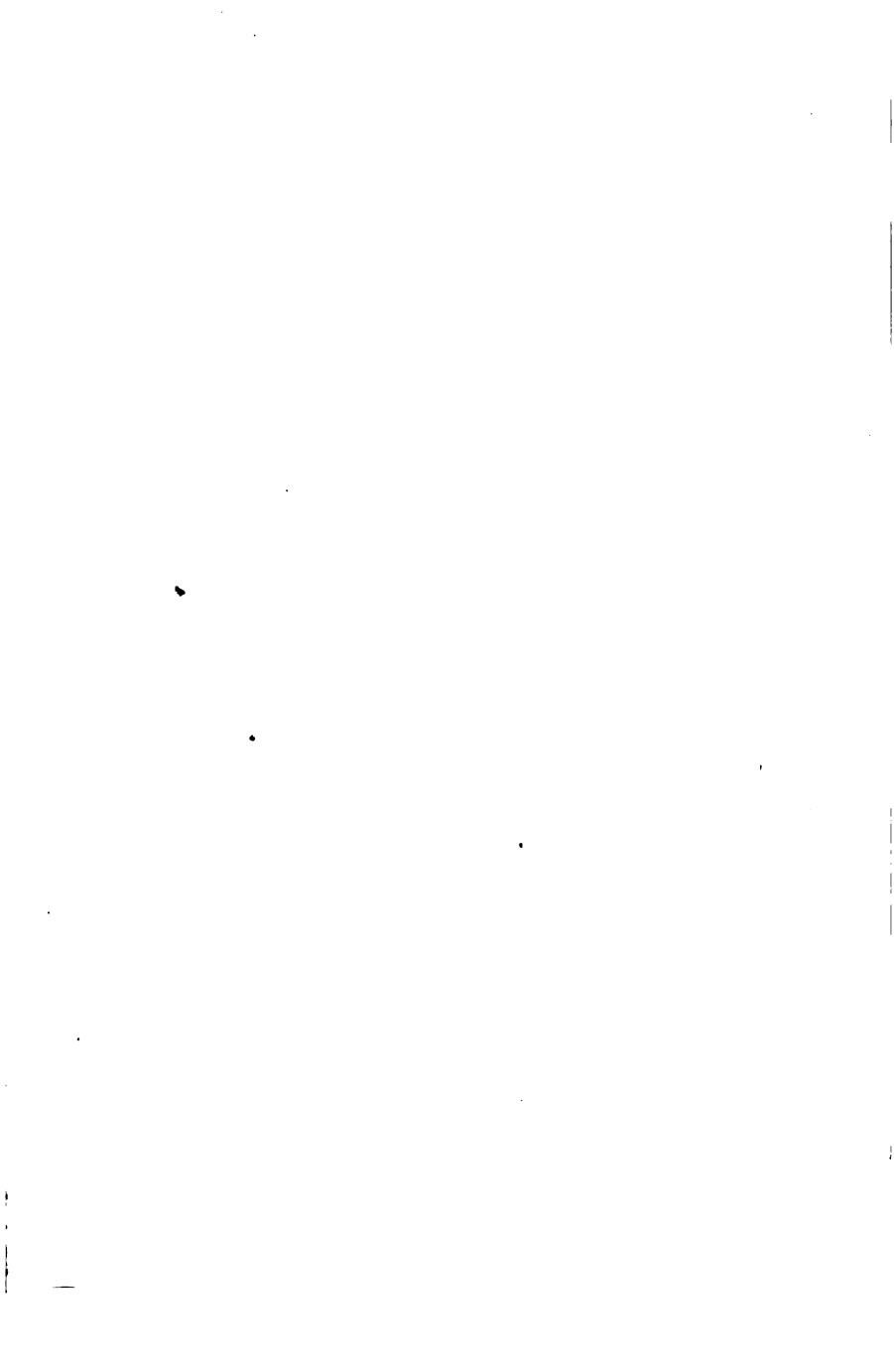






A GIRTON GIRL

VOL. II.



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VOL. II.

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A GIRTON GIRL

BY

MRS ANNIE EDWARDES

AUTHOR OF 'ARCHIE LOVELL' 'OUGHT WE TO VISIT HER?' ETC.

'O Women, Women! O our frail frail sex!
No wonder tragedies are made from us.
Always the same: nothing but loves and cradles'

The Revolt of the Women (ARISTOPHANES)

IN THREE VOLUMES

VOL. II.



LONDON

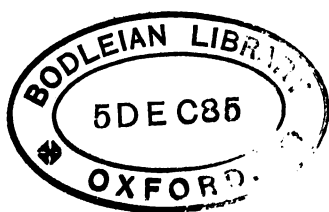
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CONTENTS

OF

THE SECOND VOLUME.



CHAPTER	PAGE
I. A RASH RESOLVE	1
II. THE FIRST CRUMPLED ROSE-LEAF	12
III. HOW DINAH SAID 'YES'	23
IV. GASTON ARBUTHNOT'S PHILOSOPHY	52
V. 'JAMES LEE'S WIFE'	70
VI. 'IS MY VIRGIL PASSABLE?'	84
VII. LINDA AS AN ART CRITIC	96
VIII. A SWAGGER AND A SWORD	113
IX. REX BASIRE'S HUMOUR	133
X. YOU—AND I!	144
XI. CUT AND THRUST.	159

vi *CONTENTS OF THE SECOND VOLUME.*

CHAPTER	PAGE
XII. GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY	174
XIII. FOR AULD LANG SYNE.	200
XIV. MISSING	212
XV. LINDA WARMS TO HER PART	226
XVI. WIFE AND HUSBAND	245
XVII. ROSE-WATER SOCIALISM	268
XVIII. CLOSE TO PORT	283

A GIRTON GIRL.



CHAPTER I.

A RASH RESOLVE.

THE strength, the delicacy of Geff Arbuthnot's character were never better shown than in his present relations to Dinah.

Weaker men pay allegiance readily enough to the passion under whose sway they happen to rest. Geff was loyal, with a fine, a rare fidelity to the love that had passed away. He was Dinah's brother, always. And the story of Saturday's rose-show told him, late that evening, by Dinah's lips, sufficed to fill him with a more than vague misgiving.

He had wished often, thinking over the difficult question of her welfare in his rough-

and-ready way, that Dinah could be forcibly saved from solitude and cross-stitch. Lo! the rescuer was at hand. But that rescuer, Geoffrey Arbuthnot's common sense informed him, should be a very different Galahad to Lord Rex Basire. Acting on the moment's impulse, Marjorie Bartrand had made a tentative effort at lifting Gaston's wife into the fellowship of her kind. And the experiment was too successful. Dinah, so Geff divined, had scarcely taken one step in public, before the little hero of a lesser hour, the most popular man in his regiment, the most sought-after partner at the island balls, thought fit, the world looking on, to throw himself at her feet.

‘And did you find pleasure in it all? Did you for a single moment feel amused to-day?’

Something in Geoffrey's voice suggested a sharper note of interrogation than was supplied by his words.

Dinah and Geff stood together on the same spot of lawn where we first heard the Arbuthnot trio talking of sentiment while they breakfasted.

Gaston was dining out, whether at the Fort William mess or at Doctor Thorne's house Dinah had not sought to know. Of what avail to ask for truth when you have once been answered with a fable, no matter how prettily that fable was illustrated?

'I was pleased for a time. Gaston showed no anger at my coming. It amused me to hear Lord Rex Basire talking down, as he thought, to my rustic understanding. Then without warning,' Dinah turned away; she looked at the pale horizon line of sea, 'I had a few moments' horrible pain.'

'You were ill!' exclaimed Geoffrey, uncertain of her drift.

'No, Geff, no. I don't mean such pain as people consult the doctors for. The pain was at my heart—a sickening doubt of everyone—a feeling that I stood on one side and all the rest of the world on the other—a sudden despair of life! Geoffrey,' she went on, 'with the gay people walking about, and the flowers smelling sweet, and the music playing, it did seem to me

for a few seconds' space that my heart must break.'

'And on which side did you range me in your thoughts? Was I with you or with all the rest of the world?' asked Geoffrey Arbuthnot.

These half confessions of Dinah's were no new experience to him. She never uttered an ungenerous suspicion of Gaston, never made a complaint as to her own neglected life. And still, a kind of moral moan had of late been constantly in poor Dinah's talk. The warm woman's heart, ill at rest, jealous, with no wholesome work or interest to keep emotion subordinate, was always, unconsciously, on the brink of betraying its secret.

He looked with pity that could never tire at her averted face.

'You, Geff?' she cried, putting on a brighter tone. 'Why, you were on my side, of course. You do everything good that is done for me in this world. Through you, for certain, Miss Bartrand came all the way from Tintajeux to call on me.'

‘Don’t give me credit on that score. Marjorie Bartrand’s doings are guided by no living person save Marjorie Bartrand. She had made up her mind to know you ; had heard, doubtless, about you and Gaston among the islanders, and of her own free will sought you out. Count me for nothing,’ said Geoffrey Arbuthnot, ‘in any action or caprice of Marjorie Bartrand’s.’

‘Had heard about me and Gaston !’ Dinah repeated his words with the preoccupation of morbidly strained feeling. ‘I think one may know pretty well what that means. No wonder so many people turned round to look at me at Saturday’s rose-show.’

‘People turn to look at you generally, do they not, Mrs. Arbuthnot? There is as much human nature, depend upon it, in the heart of the Channel as in Hyde Park or Piccadilly.’

‘That is more like a speech of Lord Rex Basire’s than of yours!’ cried Dinah, with a laugh unlike her own. ‘Throw in a lisp, varnished shoes, a waistcoat, and a double eyeglass, and I could believe it was his lordship,

not Geff Arbuthnot, who was condescending to talk to me.'

'You must have put forth all your charity, have exercised a great deal of wasted patience, in allowing his lordship to condescend at all.'

Chiefly through Gaston's spirited character sketches over the breakfast table, Geoffrey had long ago known with certainty what manner of man Lord Rex Basire was. Instead of answering, Dinah stooped above a head of garden lilies, the dense white of whose petals showed waxen and spotless through the gloom.

'I like the smell of lilies better than of all other flowers that blow,' so after a minute her rich low voice came to Geoffrey; 'I can never smell them, nor yet lavender, without thinking of Aunt Susan's garden at Lesser Cheriton.'

Where Geff first saw her! The garden amidst whose crowding summer verdure he stood at the moment when his youth went from him, when Dinah and Gaston, hand clasped in hand, bent towards each other in the level sunlight. At this hour, with the whispers of a

new love stirring in his heart, Geoffrey Arbuthnot could not hear that distant time spoken of, above all by Dinah's lips, without a thrill of the old passion, the old maddened, blinding sense of loss overcoming him.

'It might have been well for some of us,' he began, 'if we had never heard the name of Lesser Cheriton——'

But Dinah interrupted him quickly :

'No, Geoffrey, I can never believe that. If it means anything, it must mean I had better not have married Gaston. I should have no hope, no religion—I should be a woman ready for any desperate action—if I thought that my life, just as I have it, was not the one God had cut out for me as best. The fact is, you know, I have been too narrow,' she went on hurriedly. 'Something has been running in my mind all this evening—some idle talk of Lord Rex Basire's that I may repeat to you another time ; and I begin to see my conduct in a new light. From the day Gaston married me I have been too narrow, far.'

‘In what way? Give me one or two specimens of your overnarrowness.’

‘I have tried to make the sayings of one class fit in with the doings of another. I have thought that right and wrong must be the same everywhere. This was my ignorance. If I had taken up—well, with Gaston’s sort of opinions,’ she added, making an unsuccessful attempt at gaiety, ‘it might be better for me and for him, too, now.’

‘I differ from you,’ said Geff, somewhat coldly. ‘Right and wrong are the same in every class. It would be an excellent thing for your health and spirits to get more change, more society. Stop there! Remain for ever,’ added Geff warmly, ‘in such ignorance as yours.’ And indeed the thought crossed him that, at this hour, what Dinah needed was safer anchorage, not wider ship-room. ‘Your happiness and Gaston’s would be wrecked if you attempted to rule life by any other “sayings” than your own.’

But there was a goodly alloy of mild ob-

stinacy in Dinah Arbuthnot's character. A given idea started, and she was slow to part with it. The recesses of her mind would seem to shut, with pertinacious closeness, over any decided impression, once made, and the key for opening these recesses could not always be found, even by Dinah herself.

From whatever source the sudden conviction of her narrowness arose, another four-and-twenty hours showed Geoffrey that the conviction was genuine. Dinah had made some kind of compact with herself, not only in the matter of opinions but of conduct. On the following day, Sunday, it happened that Lord Rex walked home with Mrs. Arbuthnot from morning service at the town church. Invited by Gaston, whose easy hospitality extended itself to most men, Lord Rex remained to lunch. He stayed on, long after Gaston's afternoon engagements had taken him elsewhere. And Dinah, although her cheeks flushed, her spirit chafed, endured this, her first experience in the difficult duties of a hostess, without complaint.

‘Lord Rex Basire kept his Sabbath, it seems, in Miller’s Hotel,’ observed Geff, when the Arbuthnot cousins were smoking, one his short briar pipe, the other a delicately flavoured cigarette after dinner. Geoffrey’s own Sabbath had been kept in the wards of the hospital, full to overflowing with the survivors of the quarry accident. ‘No wonder Dinah confesses to a headache. That lad’s talk, a nice mixture of slang and assurance, judging from the specimens he gave us at lunch, would scarcely be of the nature Dinah loves.’

‘Oh, I don’t know. Basire can be very fair company when he likes,’ said Gaston, with philosophic optimism. ‘He is not a giant, intellectually. But in their heart of hearts, Geff, however unflattering this may be to you and me, women don’t care a straw for intellectual men—until they have been authoritatively labelled. The island ladies, from Madame the Archdeaconess downwards, delight in Lord Rex, title, disabled arm, slang, assurance—all.’

‘Imagine five hours of him at a stretch.

That is about what your wife had to live through to-day.'

'Dinah is rousing herself, I hope and believe. It will do her all the good in the world to live through being bored.' This was said with amiable imperturbability by Dinah's husband. 'I trust for her own sake, poor girl, she is learning reason, beginning to discover there may be other music in the spheres besides that of the eternal domestic duo without accompaniment.'

Geoffrey Arbuthnot puffed away at his pipe in silence.

'It was a great thing getting her to the rose-show. For that, Geff, I suspect, I must thank you.' Gaston gave a penetrating glance at his cousin's face. 'Miss Bartrand would certainly not have called on us but at your instigation, and through Miss Bartrand my poor Dinah has been introduced—well, to Lord Rex Basire, an Open Sesame! let us trust, to the strictly guarded gates of insular society.'

CHAPTER II.

THE FIRST CRUMPLED ROSE-LEAF.

REX BASIRE showed no disposition to let his newly made acquaintance with Dinah Arbuthnot cool. Long before the hour for visitors on Monday afternoon, Louise, the French waitress, entered the Arbuthnots' parlour. She placed before Dinah a card, also a bouquet made up entirely of white and costly hothouse flowers. Just like the bouquet Gaston gave her on her wedding morning! thought Dinah, with a rush of bitter-sweet recollection.

‘The Monsieur who was here yesterday, le petit Milor au moustache blond, demanded the news of Madame. Was Madame visible? Should she, Louise, pray Milor to enter?’

Dinah glanced with indifference at card and flowers alike, then she rose from her work-table. Gaston Arbuthnot, it happened, was at home, putting the finishing touches to 'Dodo's Despair,' in his improvised studio. Walking quickly to the open window, Dinah, in a whisper, appealed to her husband.

'Gaston, how shall I get rid of Lord Rex Basire? He has sent in his card and some flowers, as if flowers from a stranger could give one pleasure! He demands news of me, the French girl says, but that is too senseless. Tell me the civil way to—to——'

'Shut the door in his face,' observed Gaston Arbuthnot, looking up from his model as Dinah hesitated. 'Why shut the door at all? The poor boy will be better off talking to you than he would be making useless purchases for young ladies in the Petersport shops.'

'But I am at work. I am counting off stitches for the forget-me-nots round Aunt Susan's ottoman, and then I shall come outside. I want no company but yours.'

‘Basire will help you to count forget-me-nots. The very employment he would delight in!’

And, raising his voice, Gaston Arbuthnot called cheerily to the servant that Madame was visible. There was no time for Dinah to escape. In another minute Lord Rex had followed his hothouse bouquet, his card, and the French waitress into her presence.

She suffered him to possess her hand for one chill, unwilling instant. Determined, after a somewhat confused and halting fashion, to amend the error of her ways, to instruct herself, as in a book, in the usages of Gaston’s world, poor Dinah shrank like a child from the initiatory chapter of her lesson. She had endured Lord Rex, yesterday, in the spirit of martyrdom. But to-day, to-morrow! Over what space between the present time and September was her endurance to last?

‘I was afraid, if I waited till the afternoon, you would be out, Mrs. Arbuthnot. And I have a weighty matter to put into your hands;

I—I—mean an awfully great favour to ask of you.'

Rex Basire, as garrison society knew him, was a youth weighted by no undue modesty, no obsolete chivalrous deference in his manner towards Woman. He really shone, little though Dinah might appreciate such shining, as he stood, hesitating—for a moment half abashed—before the calm coldness of her face.

'You will forgive me for calling at this unholy hour?' he proceeded as she remained silent.

Dinah Arbuthnot glanced towards the flood of sunshine that rested on the flower-bright borders of Mr. Miller's garden.

'Why is the hour unholy?' she inquired, with slow gravity.

'I mean an hour when you were certain to be busy,' said Lord Rex, approaching her work-table. 'Now I can see I am interrupting you, Mrs. Arbuthnot, am I not?'

He drew forward a chair for Dinah; then, after standing for some appreciable time, and

finding that she neither spoke to him nor looked at him, he seated himself, uninvited.

‘Awful shame, isn’t it, to interrupt you like this?’

‘It does not matter much, my lord. My time was occupied in nothing more important than counting stitches for a border—that dreariest form of feminine arithmetic,’ Dinah’s lips relaxed, ‘as my husband calls it.’

‘Does your husband say so really? Just what one might expect. All husbands are alike.’

Modelling his clay outside, Mr. Arbuthnot smiled good-humouredly to himself at the remark.

‘Now, to me—you mustn’t mind my saying so—lovely woman is never so lovely as when she is absolutely a woman! Dead against the higher education business—girl graduates—platform females—you know the style of thing I mean. Only one out of my tribe of sisters, Vic, the eldest, works at her needle—my favourite sister from my cradle.’

Rex Basire felt that he threw a shade of discriminative, yet unmistakable flattery into this avowal of family preference. Dinah held her peace, having in her possession none of those useful colloquial counters which less uninformed persons have agreed to accept as coin. Rex Basire's generalisation about husbands lingered in her mind with unpleasant, with personal significance. Was it possible that Gaston's coolness towards her had become matter of comment in the idle little world to which Linda Thorne and Lord Rex Basire both belonged?

'I work at my needle,' she remarked presently, 'because I am not gifted enough to do better things. If I had talent, a tenth part of talent like Gaston's, I should not spend my time counting threads of canvas.'

So the discriminative flattery had fallen through. Lord Rex tapped his exceedingly white teeth with the top of his cane. He searched diligently throughout the length and breadth of his brain for subject-matter, and

found the land naked. His want of inspiration must, he began to think, be Mrs. Arbuthnot's fault. These constant allusions to the absent husband were crushingly unsuggestive; tended, indeed, towards irksomeness. Arbuthnot was a well-looking man enough, of the usual American type, clever, possibly, in his way,—could knead up clay into droll little figures, and sing French songs without accent! It was distinctly not to listen to Gaston Arbuthnot's praises that Lord Rex had toiled under a hot sun, and at this 'unholy hour,' from Fort William Barracks up to Miller's Sarnian Hotel.

He asked himself if Dinah were really as beautiful as during the past two days and nights she had appeared before him in his dreams? With a world full of charming women, most of them disposed, thought Lord Rex, to value one adequately, were this particular woman's good graces high enough stakes to be worth playing for?

Was she really, if one watched her dispassionately, so beautiful?

. Dinah set up her frame, and, leaning over it, began, or went through the semblance of beginning, to count her stitches. In doing so the line of down-bent golden head, the sweep of lash on the pink cheek, the outline of throat and shoulder, were given with full unconscious effect to Lord Rex. And the young man's heresy left him. Whatever his other scepticisms, he felt, while he lived he could never doubt more on one subject, the flawless-ness of Dinah Arbuthnot's beauty.

‘Please let me help you in your dreary arithmetic, Mrs. Arbuthnot. Lend me a needle, at least, and give me a trial. I have only one hand to use, but I have been shown, often, how worsted-work stitches are counted.’ And, indeed, Rex Basire had had a pretty wide training in most unprofitable pursuits. ‘Each little painted square of the pattern goes for two threads, does it not?’

‘I am sure I did not know gentlemen understood about cross-stitch!’ And Dinah reluctantly surrendered her canvas to his outstretched

hand. 'Your lordship,' she added, 'will never make out the different shades of blue. This forget-me-not border is the most heart-breaking pattern I have worked.'

Your lordship—your lordship! Gaston's face assumed an unwonted liveliness of colour as his wife's voice reached him. Would Dinah never leave off talking as the young ladies talk behind the counters in glove shops, he asked himself? Would she never learn the common everyday titles by which men and women address each other in the world?

The clay was no longer plastic under Mr. Arbuthnot's touch. He moved without sound to the window. He took a discerning glance at the two people seated beside the table—Lord Rex with masculine awkward fingers solemnly parcelling out canvas forget-me-nots, as though his commission depended on his accuracy; Dinah, a look of shy amusement on her face, demurely watching him.

Gaston Arbuthnot took one glance. Then he put aside his tools, wrapped a wet cloth

hastily around 'Dodo's Despair,' and with a manner not devoid of a certain impatience, prepared to quit his studio. Could it be—the question presented itself unbidden—that a shadow of coming distrust had fallen on him? The thought was absurd. He, Gaston Arbuthnot, distrustful of the gentle, home-staying girl, whose devotion to himself had at times—poor Dinah—amounted to something worse than a fault, an inconvenience! That to-morrow's sun should rise in the east was not a surer fact than that his wife's Griselda-like fidelity should endure to the end.

And still, in the inmost conscience of him, Gaston Arbuthnot was uncomfortable.

He had spent nearly four years of absolute trust—four golden years of youth, of love, with the sweetest companion that ever blest the lot of erring man. In this moment he realised the sensation of the first crumpled rose-leaf. Commonly jealous he could not be. His temperament, the circumstances of his lot, forbade ignoble feeling. He knew that for a man

like Rex Basire, toleration must be the kindest sentiment that Dinah, with difficulty, could bring herself to entertain.

It was not jealousy, not distrust; it was simply the reversal of all past experience that disconcerted Gaston's mind. It was the whole abnormal picture—the diverted look on Dinah's face, her embroidery needle and canvas—*hers*—between Rex Basire's fingers, that was so blankly unwelcome in his sight.

If Gaston Arbuthnot ever in his life was an actor in a similar bit of drawing-room comedy, you may be sure the rôle chosen by him had been the one now played by Lord Rex. Some other fellow-mortal in a blouse, and with clay-stained hands, may have watched from the slips. It was Gaston who counted the stitches!

He was not cut out by Nature to take subordinate parts; and this his first little taste of abdicated power had a singularly insipid flavour to his palate.

CHAPTER III.

HOW DINAH SAID 'YES.'

REX BASIRE, meanwhile, counted manfully on. A hundred-and-ten from the corner scroll to the first line of blue; and seventy-six, either way, of grounding. Emboldened by success, he insisted upon filling in the yellow heart of a single forget-me-not. 'Just as a souvenir!' he pleaded, contriving to get through the task cleverly enough. A twelvemonth hence, when half the world lay between them, he thought Mrs. Arbuthnot might look at the centre of this forget-me-not, and remember to-day!

'I shall remember a length of filoselle wasted. Your lordship's stitches must be picked out at once—they are worked the wrong way of the silk.' Taking back the needle and

canvas, Dinah began to put her threat into instant execution. ‘A twelvemonth hence,’ she added, ‘I hope to be looking at something more interesting than wool-work. Most of my pieces get stored away, for no one in particular. This ottoman is for my Aunt Susan in Cambridgeshire. It will be a great set-off to her front parlour,’—Dinah admitted this with a tinge of artist’s pride; ‘but I am not likely to see it there. We have not been to Cheriton for four years, and——’

‘Happy Aunt Susan!’ exclaimed Lord Rex, who was wont to be a little impudent without awakening anger. ‘What would I give to have—not an ottoman for my front parlour—but something modest, a kettle-holder with an appropriate motto, say, worked for me by fair and charitable fingers!’

‘By your favourite sister’s, perhaps.’

Dinah’s voice was cold and clear as ice as she offered the suggestion.

‘You are in an unkind mood, Mrs. Arbuthnot. So unkind,’ Lord Rex took up a pair of

scissors, and regarded them solemnly, as though they had been the shears of fate, 'that I feel, beforehand, you mean to say "No" to everything I ask. I told you, did I not, that I had come to put a weighty matter into your hands?'

'Do nothing of the kind, my lord. I am unused to receiving favours from a stranger. Your flowers are very beautiful'—with a touch Dinah placed the bouquet two or three inches farther from her—'and I daresay your lordship meant it kindly to bring them. That is enough! I live quite retired, and——'

Stopping short, Dinah coloured violently. At this moment she heard Gaston's tread as he ran down the outer stone staircase. She knew that she was left alone with Rex Basire for just as long as Rex Basire might think fit to stay.

'But we hope to win a favour from *you*. The subalterns of the regiment are getting up a party for Wednesday, and we want to know if you will condescend to play hostess for us? We mean to be original,' Lord Rex hurried on, not giving Dinah time to speak and refuse.

‘Instead of having a humdrum dance or dinner on terra-firma, we mean to charter a yacht—the *Princess*, now lying in Guernsey harbour—and carry all the nicest-looking people in the island out to sea.’

Dinah’s eyes gave him a look of momentary but severe disapproval.

‘For this, a hostess is imperatively needed. Chaperonage, in its most venerable form, we can command. I’ve been spending the forenoon, I give you my word I have, in paying court to old ladies. Miss Tighe smiles on our project. The Archdeaconess does not frown. Of course we have Mrs. Verschoyle. But we want a great deal more than venerable chaperons. We want a young and charming lady to do the honours for us. Mrs. Arbuthnot, we want you!’

Now Dinah’s nature held as little commonplace vanity as could well fall to woman’s share: through commonplace vanity had Lord Rex never, at this juncture, won her to say ‘Yes.’ From pleasure, so-called, she had shrunk, more

than ever, since the taste she got of pleasure at the rose-show—yes, during the very hours when, with rash strategy, she had been planning to act a part in Gaston Arbuthnot's world, among Gaston's friends.

But every human being, given a wide enough scope, must end by justifying the cynic's aphorism. The resisting powers of the best man, of the best woman living, have their price, so far as insignificant mundane matters are concerned.

No need to seek far for poor sore-hearted Dinah's price!

Whispers of the projected yachting party had, for several days past, reached her, chiefly in fragments of talk between her husband and the other boarders in Miller's Hotel. She knew that Gaston was an invited guest. She had an impression, based on air and yet, like many a jealous fear, not all foundationless, that Linda Thorne was to be the quasi-hostess, the graceful presiding influence of the hour.

'Me—you ask me?' she faltered, sensible

of a blinding rush of temptation, and not lifting her eyes from the canvas where she had now effaced the last trace of Lord Rex's handiwork. 'I should think others would be more suitable. I should think,' the blood forsook her lips as she suggested the name, 'that Mrs. Thorne——'

'Oh, we have decided, all of us, against Linda,' said Lord Rex, with his usual cool sincerity. 'Mrs. Thorne is the nicest woman going, on shore.'

'Of that I am convinced.'

'And she has been kind enough to murmur an experimental "Yes," though no one acknowledges to having asked her. (A suspicion goes about that it was Arbuthnot!) But Mrs. Thorne's qualities are not sea-going. She has not the marine foot, as your husband would say. She and the Doctor will be of our party, of course, but Linda could never play the part of hostess for us. Oscar Jones took her and the de Carteret girls out sand-eeling—you know little Oscar, the one handsome fellow in the regiment?—and Mrs. Linda was sea-sick straight

through the jolliest night of May moonlight. You like the ocean, I am sure, Mrs. Arbuthnot.'

'Yes, I like it. Years ago, when we had not long been married, Mr. Arbuthnot hired a little cutter yacht. We spent four weeks at sea off the coast of Scotland. They were the happiest weeks of my life.'

Dinah said this with her accustomed quiet reserve. Yet, had Lord Rex known her better, he might have discerned a tremor in her voice as she recalled those far-off days—days when neither mistrust nor coldness had marred the first ineffable joy of her love for Gaston Arbuthnot.

'That is all right; I am a second Byron myself. The sea is my passion. It would have been a sort of blow—I hope you understand me when I say that it would have been a sort of blow—to hear you say you were a bad sailor.'

Dinah, who never helped out a flattering speech, direct or implied, looked away from him.

‘A suspicion goes about that it was Arbuthnot.’ The words rang in her ears; light words, heedlessly spoken, yet destined to swell the total with which Gaston Arbuthnot was already too heavily credited on the balance-sheet of his wife’s heart.

‘We may count upon you, may we not? Arbuthnot has accepted for himself. Now we want your promise. If the weather continues like this we may rely upon seeing you on board the *Princess* next Wednesday?’

‘You have not explained what seeing me on board the *Princess* means.’ Dinah’s tone was evasive. Probably, thought Lord Rex, the puritanical conscience required time to collect itself! ‘I don’t know, at my staid age,’ she added, ‘that I should countenance you. What did you say about carrying all the nice-looking people in Guernsey out to sea?’

Upon this slight whisper of encouragement Rex Basire entered voluminously into details. The proprieties—to begin, he declared, solemn of face, with the facts of greatest significance—

the proprieties were set at rest. An undeniable Archdeaconess, a Cassandra Tighe (minus nothing but her harp), were secured. The de Carteret girls, and Rosie Verschoyle, four of the Guernsey beauties regnant, had accepted. It would be a high spring tide on Wednesday, and the *Princess* must start early to reach the Race of Alderney before the ebb. Afternoon would find them anchored off Langrune, in Normandy. 'Where we shall land, observe the manners and customs of the natives, eat a French dinner, take our little whirl, perhaps, in the casino ball-room,' said Lord Rex, 'and so back, à la Pepys, to our virtuous homes.'

'The scheme is too gay for me,' cried Dinah, with an uneasy dread of Gaston's disapproval. 'I never danced in my life. I hope—no, I am sure, my lord, that I shall never set foot inside the walls of a casino.'

'Not of a French casino, Mrs. Arbuthnot?' Lord Rex argued warily, still mindful of the puritanical note.

‘Certainly not. A French casino! Why, that only makes it worse.’

‘A French casino is an innocent kind of sea-side dancing school. Papas and mammas of families sit around. Small boys and girls exhibit their steps. Papa drinks his little glass of absinthe, mamma her tumbler of sugar-water. We go back to our hotel, hand-in-hand with the babies, at ten o’clock. Except the Zoological Gardens on week days, I know no human form of dissipation so mild as a French casino.’

‘I should have to meet too many strangers on board. I should be alone among them all. The only lady in Guernsey who has called on me is Geff’s pupil, Miss Bartrand of Tintajeux.’

‘Who will be invited to come, under your charge.’ Lord Rex adroitly left more delicate social questions untouched. ‘Marjorie Bartrand would be rough on a chaperon, I should think. Difficult to say whom the Girtonian of the future would not be rough on! But you, Mrs. Arbuthnot, seem to have stepped into her favour.’

'And is Geoffrey to be asked?'

'Geoffrey? Ah, to be sure—your cousin. Senior wrangler, was he not?'

'Geoffrey took his honours in classics.'

'Frightfully "boss" man, any way. Does not look as if he cared about frivolous amusements in general, still——'

Lord Rex hesitated. Some finer prophetic sense informed him that Geoffrey Arbuthnot's might be a name as well omitted from the programme of pleasure he was chalking out with such zealous trouble for next Wednesday.

'But is the party to be frivolous? I hardly understood that. No one loves the sea better than Geff. He will go, I'm sure, if I go.'

This was said by Dinah with conviction. Through long habit she had come to regard Geoffrey's obedience to her smallest wish as an accomplished fact.

'Notes shall be despatched to Miss Bartrand and to your cousin without an hour's delay. I am awfully indebted to you, Mrs. Arbuthnot. You can't think what a load of moral obligation

you have taken off my mind by saying "Yes."

And when Lord Rex left Miller's Hotel he was radiant; a possibility of Geoffrey Arbuthnot saying 'Yes' also, the one little shadow of a cloud that obscured next Wednesday's horizon.

On his return to Fort William, later on in the day, his road took him past the garden gate of Doctor Thorne's Bungalow. The gate stood open, and Lord Rex sauntered in, as it was the habit of unoccupied insular youth to do, during the afternoon hours of tea and gossip.

Small Rahnee and her ayah were picturesquely grouped upon a bright square of Persian carpet on the lawn. A macaw and two tame parrots gave a local, or eastern, colour to the scene as they screeched from their perches among the garden shrubs. Within one of the drawing-room windows—bay windows opening to the ground—reposed Linda. Her dress was of embroidered Indian muslin, not absolutely innocent of darns, perhaps, for the Doctor

retained so much of old bachelor habit as to be his own housekeeper, and poor Linda must practise many a humiliating economy in her lot of femme incomprise. Bangles, similar to Rahnee's, concealed the outline of the lady's thin wrists. Her black hair, worn in a single coil, revealed sharply the outline of her head, Linda's one incontestably good point. The cunningly arranged shadow of a rose-coloured window awning, if it did not hide, at least threw possible defects of complexion, suspicions of coming crow's-feet, into uncertainty.

Linda Thorne was not a pretty woman. Lord Rex, his eyes still dazzled by Dinah's wild rose face, felt more than usually cognizant of the fact. And still, with Rahnee and the turbaned ayah, with the macaws and parrots, the embroidered Indian dress, the Indian-looking bungalow, Linda 'composed' well. She formed the central figure of a Benjamin Constant picture, right pleasant to behold.

A hum of animated voices was in the air. Three or four young and pretty girls were dis-

tributed, spots of agreeable colour, about Linda's sober-hued drawing-room. The prettiest of them all presided over a miniature tea-table drawn close beside the hostess at the open window. And the burthen of everybody's talk, the clashing point of everybody's opinions, was next Wednesday's yachting-party.

‘We are to start at seven. Mamma heard it from Captain Ozanne, himself.’

‘At midnight of Tuesday. The *Princess* will be away twenty-four hours.’

‘A week, at least, Rosie! And Madame Corbie is to be chaperon.’

‘I heard—Cassandra Tighe.’

‘There are to be no chaperons worth speaking of, for of course—don't be offended, Linda—we cannot look upon you as one, so——’

‘So you are quite wrong, all of you,’ exclaimed Lord Rex, his head peeping up suddenly across Linda Thorne's shoulder. ‘Miss Verschoyle, will you give me a cup of tea if I promise to set you right in a few of your

guesses? A cup of tea, and your protection, for I am certain to be well attacked.'

'This stimulates our curiosity to the proper point,' the young lady answered, with a doubtful smile, but making place for Lord Rex at her side. 'At the same time, it is an admission you have been doing something rather less wise than usual. Do you take six or seven lumps of sugar in your tea, Lord Rex? I never remember the precise number.'

Rosie Verschoyle was a bright-complexioned dimpled girl of nineteen, with an exactly proportioned waist (of society), an exactly correct profile, the exact mass of nut-brown hair that fashion requires descending to her brows, and a pair of large, nut-brown, somewhat spaniel-like eyes. Until Dinah's advent Lord Rex thought Rosie the fairest among the beauties regnant, and was openly her slave at all the picnics and garden-parties going. Miss Verschoyle had not the air of encouraging these attentions. She seldom lost a chance of making Rex Basire's vanity smart, and had been known to say that

she positively disliked that plain, forward boy who managed to scare away really pleasant partners and monopolise one's best dances. And still, throughout the whole island society, among Rosie's more intimate girl-friends notably, there had been a growing suspicion for some time past that Miss Verschoyle would, one day, marry Lord Rex Basire.

'I take as many lumps as Miss Verschoyle chooses to give me.' He received the cup with mock humility from her plump, white, inexpressive hands. 'The sweets and bitters as they come.'

'Bitters—in tea!' echoed Rosie, opening her brown eyes wide. 'Steer clear of metaphors, Lord Rex. They really do not suit your style of eloquence.'

'Rosie, Rosie! While you two children spar, the rest of us are dying of curiosity.' The admonition was made in Linda's smoothest voice. 'Lord Rex, recollect your promise. You know, you are to set us all right. What are the plans for Wednesday? Why are we

certain, when we have heard these plans, to attack you? Come here, and make confession.'

Lord Rex perched himself, obediently, on a stool near Mrs. Thorne's feet. Then, sipping the tea sweetened for him by Rosie Verschoyle, with more trepidation of spirit, so he afterwards owned, than he ever felt before the fire of an enemy, he thus began his shrift :

'We have made due inquiry from the harbour master, and find the *Princess* must clear out as soon as the first English steamer is signalled. Will seven o'clock be too early for you all?'

A chorus of cheerfully acquiescent voices answered, 'No.'

'We have also invited Madame Corbie and the Archdeacon. It seems, for an expedition of the kind, one ought to have a real substantial chaperon or two. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Thorne, but——'

'Oh, don't apologise,' cried Linda, with good humour, willing, like most of her sex, to condone the accusation of over-youth.

‘ And Madame Corbie accepts, conditionally. I have been paying my court to aged ladies half the morning! So, unconditionally, does Miss Tighe. As regards chaperonage, one may say really—really—’ hesitated Lord Rex, feeling in his guilty soul how red he grew, ‘ one may say, Mrs. Thorne, that, in the matter of chaperons, there will be an embarrassment of riches.’

‘ Especially as mamma never allows me to go anywhere without herself. Was it about the superabundance of chaperons that you knew we should attack you?’

Rosie Verschoyle asked the question in her gay, thin little voice, her unpremeditated manner, yet with a directness of aim that poor Lord Rex had not the cleverness to parry.

‘ Attack me? Why that was only a foolish joke, don’t you know! Yes, we—we have Mrs. Verschoyle and the Archdeaconess as chaperons-in-chief. Only, poor Mrs. Verschoyle, the moment the *Princess* moves, will be in the cabin, and the Archdeaconess——’

'Try not to look so conscious. The Archdeaconess?'

'If the wind veers between this and Wednesday, will not start at all. And so, as we must have a married lady to do hostess for us, and as you, Mrs. Thorne, are also not a first-rate sailor, I have asked Mrs. Arbuthnot.'

A heavy silence followed upon this announcement. Linda Thorne was the first to break it.

'And Mrs. Arbuthnot has accepted? I need hardly ask the question.'

'Yes,' returned Lord Rex, staunchly enough, 'I am glad to say that Mrs. Arbuthnot has accepted.'

Rosie Verschoyle turned over and examined a band of silver on her round white wrist.

'Mrs. Arbuthnot? Surely that is the same person we saw with Marjorie Bartrand at the rose-show? How wonderfully handsome she is! Mamma has talked of nothing else. One will be quite too glad to see her near. In these democratic days we must all bow unquestion-

ingly before Beauty. The capital B renders it abstract.'

Lord Rex felt the speech to be ungenerous. Vague questionings that he had once or twice held within himself, as to whether he might or might not be in danger of liking Miss Verschoye too well, received an impromptu solution at this moment. He was in no danger at all, held the local estimate of her good looks, even, to be overstrained. As she stood before him, in her fulness of youthful grace, the delicate profile held aloft, the little cruel sentences escaping, one by one, from her pouting red lips, Rosie's prettiness seemed changed to Rex Basire as though the wand of some malignant fairy god-mother had secretly touched her.

'My political opinions outstep democracy, Miss Verschoye. But if I were as starched a Tory as—as my own father, by Jove! I should think Mrs. Arbuthnot's society an honour. I don't understand that sort of thing, the tone people put on in speaking of a woman whose only crime is her beauty.'

‘Mrs. Arbuthnot, if she needs a defender, is fortunate in possessing so warm a one.’

The remark was made by Rosie Verschoyle, with unwise readiness.

‘But one could never imagine her, poor dear, needing anything of the kind.’ It was Linda Thorne who spoke. ‘I have been introduced to Mrs. Arbuthnot by her husband. I have heard about her, also from him, and I am sure she is quite the most harmless of individuals. Not naturally bright! Like too many other gifted creatures, Mr. Arbuthnot may know the want of household sympathy——’

‘Gets along capitally without it,’ interrupted Lord Rex. ‘Never saw any man better satisfied with himself and with his life than Arbuthnot.’

‘Not naturally bright, and lacking the education which, in more fortunate people, serves as a varnish to poorness of ability. If they stay here long enough I shall persuade Mr. Arbuthnot, as a duty, to make his wife take lessons—in music, riding, calisthenics, anything

to beguile her from that patient, that perpetual cross-stitch.'

Lord Rex gave a searching look at Linda Thorne's face. His was no very high or luminous character, as will be seen in the after course of this history. Yet were his failings chiefly those of his age and circumstances. When he erred, it was without premeditation, walking along tracks trodden hard by others. His virtues were his own, and among these was the virtue of thorough straightforwardness. It trembled on Lord Rex's tongue to ask Linda a crucial question relative to Gaston Arbuthnot's 'duty,' when approaching footsteps made themselves heard along the gravel drive. There came a shrill shout of welcome in Rahnee's voice, a torrent of pigeon English, presumably from the ayah, in which the words 'Missy 'Butnot' might be distinguished. Linda Thorne's Indian-bleached cheeks assumed a just perceptible shade of red.

'Talk of angels,' she observed, raising her finger to her lips, 'and straightway we hear the

flutter of their wings! It would be wise to choose a rather less invidious theme than the demerits of cross-stitch.'

And then, almost before she finished speaking, Gaston Arbuthnot, with the quiet air of a man certain of the reception that awaits him, entered upon the scene.

Next Wednesday's yachting expedition continued to be the subject of talk among Linda's visitors. But it was talk with a difference; the character of Ophelia cut, by desire, from the play. Hard to bewail the lot of gifted creatures, or discuss the necessity, in these democratic days, of bowing down to Beauty, with Dinah's husband taking part in one's conversation! When the party had dispersed, however,—Lord Rex, in spite of his disenchantment, escorting Rosie Verschoyle home—when Linda Thorne was left alone with Gaston Arbuthnot, she spoke her mind. And her tone was one which all her social knowledge, all her powers of self-command and self-effacement, failed to render sweet.

Now it was a peculiarity belonging to Gaston

Arbuthnot's character, that he was apt to mystify every human creature, his cousin Geoffrey excepted, with whom his relations were near. The more intimate you became with this man, the less firm seemed the moral grip by which you held him. Dinah's over-diffident heart perpetually doubted the stability of his love. She was unhappy with him, dreading lest, in her society, he were not enough amused. She was unhappy away from him, dreading lest in her absence he were amused too well! Linda Thorne was equally at fault as to the texture of his friendship. Long years ago, Gaston Arbuthnot's boyish good looks—perhaps it must be owned, Gaston Arbuthnot's devoted attentions—won all of tender sentiment that Linda, then a neglected, overworked governess, had to give. She had been to India in the interval. She had learnt the market worth of sentiment. There was Dr. Thorne Rahnee! There were her duties, real and histrionic, to fill her life. And the days of her youth had reached the flickering hour before twilight.

But Linda had not forgiven Gaston Arbuthnot. She had not forgotten how near she once came to loving him. And she was sorely, unreasonably wounded, through vanity rather than through feeling, by Dinah's fresh and girlish charm.

An anomalous position ; perhaps, a commoner one than some young wives, morbidly sensitive as to alien influence over their husbands, may suspect.

'So there has been a small imbroglio about Wednesday's arrangements ! I cannot tell you how glad I am to be relieved from a weight of sea-going responsibility. Mrs. Arbuthnot, I am sure, will enact hostess for our young subalterns so much more gracefully than I could. She is a good sailor, doubtless ?'

Gaston had taken up a morsel of drawing-paper and some red chalk—every kind of artistic appliance had found its way, of late, into Mrs. Thorne's drawing-room—some ideal woman's face with beauty, with anger on it, was growing into life under his hand. He finished, in a

few delicate, subtle touches, the shadow between a low Greek brow and eyelid ere he spoke.

‘Dinah is a famous sailor. We look back to a little Scottish yachting tour we made, soon after our marriage, as about the best time of our lives.’

Linda Thorne, a fair decipherer of surface feeling in general, could gather absolutely nothing from Gaston’s level tone. He raised his eyes, during a steady second or two, from his paper ; he met her interrogative glance with one of strict neutrality.

‘I am relieved and at the same time stupidly inquisitive. Now, why, in the name of all things truthful, did you not mention that Mrs. Arbuthnot meant to go with us on Wednesday?’

Gaston was silent ; too absorbed perhaps in his creation, slight chalk sketch though it was, to give heed to matter so unimportant as this which Linda pressed upon him.

‘Possibly you were not aware that Mrs. Arbuthnot *was* going?’

Linda Thorne hazarded the remark with a suspicion of innocent malice.

‘That really is the truth.’ Taking a folding-book from his breast, Gaston stored away his sketch carefully between its leaves. ‘You must excuse me, Mrs. Thorne. An idea struck me just now, suggested by a look I surprised on the face of Miss Verschoyle, and I hastened forthwith to make my memorandum. Dinah to enact hostess for the subalterns on Wednesday, do you say? Surely not. I could almost wish that it were to be so. But my wife, as you know, keeps to her own quiet way of life.’

‘We have Lord Rex Basire’s word for it. According to Lord Rex, Mrs. Arbuthnot has most decidedly accepted their invitation.’

‘Dinah does not mean to go. Lord Rex deceives himself.’

Gaston Arbuthnot spoke with sincerity. He had told Geoffrey, as a jest, that Dinah was turning over a new leaf, beginning to discover, poor girl, that there might be other music in the spheres besides that of the eternal domestic

duo without accompaniment. Of Dinah's profoundly changed mood, her resolve of gaining wider views by frequenting a world which as yet she knew not, he was ignorant.

Linda Thorne watched him sceptically.

'Pray do not dash my hopes. I trust and I believe that Mrs. Arbuthnot will play hostess to us all next Wednesday. Come!' she added, with rather forced playfulness. 'Will you make me a bet about it? I will give you any amount of odds you like, in Jouvin's best.'

'It is against my principles to bet on a certainty, Mrs. Thorne. I am as certain that Dinah has not pledged herself for Wednesday's picnic as that I have pledged myself to dine with Doctor and Mrs. Thorne this evening.'

But, in spite of his assured voice, a shade of restlessness was to be traced in Gaston Arbuthnot's manner. He would not remain, as it had become his habit to do, at The Bungalow, singing, or drawing, or chatting away the two hours between afternoon tea and dinner, in Linda's society. Even Rahnee (to Gaston's

mind the first attraction in the house) must forego her usual game of hide-and-seek with 'Missy 'Butnot.' Even Rahnee threw her thin, bangled arms round her playmate's neck in vain. Frankly, so, at last, he was brought to make confession, he had forgotten to tell Dinah of his engagement, must hurry back, forthwith, to Miller's Hotel to set Dinah's heart at rest. Unnecessary? 'Ah, Mrs. Thorne,' and as he spoke Gaston's eyes looked straight into the lady's soul, 'that question of necessity just depends upon the state of one's domestic legislation. Regarding these small matters, my wife and I, fortunately for ourselves, are in our honeymoon stage still.'

This was always Gaston's tone in speaking of Dinah at The Bungalow. He painted truth in truth's brightest colours whenever he afforded Linda Thorne a glimpse of his own household happiness.

CHAPTER IV.

GASTON ARBUTHNOT'S PHILOSOPHY.

THE first dressing-bell was ringing by the time he reached the hotel. Dinah's parlour was empty; her embroidery frame—silver paper shrouding its impossible forget-me-nots and auriculas from the light of heaven—stood on her work-table. Passing into the adjoining room without knocking, Mr. Arbuthnot beheld a sight not new to him, save as regarded the hour of the day—Dinah on her knees beside her bed, her head bowed, her face hidden between her hands.

She rose up hurriedly at the sound of her husband's entrance. She brushed away some tell-tale tears, not, however, before Gaston's quick glance had had opportunity to detect them.

All men dislike the sight of a wife in tears. A small minority may dislike the sight of a wife on her knees. Gaston Arbuthnot shared both prejudices. He concealed his irritation under a kiss—cold, mechanical, the recipient felt those kisses to be—bestowed on each of Dinah's flushing cheeks.

'I beg a thousand pardons for disturbing you at your prayers, my dear, but——'

'I was not praying. I wish I had been,' interrupted Dinah, promptly. 'To pray, one's heart must be at rest.'

Now Gaston Arbuthnot looked upon all strong and unpleasant emotion with a feeling bordering on actual repugnance. And Dinah's voice had that in it which threatened storm. His irritation grew.

'I beg your pardon for interrupting a mood not calm enough for prayer (although it required a prayerful attitude), yet sad enough for tears. That terrible habit of weeping will wear away even your good looks in time, Dinah.'

A time far distant, surely! Never had she

been fairer in Gaston's sight than at this moment, in her fresh cambric dinner dress, with her hair like a nimbus of gold around her forehead, with a colour vermeil as any Italian dawn on the cheeks his lips had newly touched.

'I should like to keep my good looks till I am fifty years old, if good looks were only faithful servants, if they brought one only a taste of real happiness! As it is——'

'My dear girl, although you chance to be a little out of temper with life, don't forget you have a husband. I am a vain man—so you and Geff tell me—and the chief of all my vanities is, that I am blest with a handsome wife.'

'Out of temper with life? I think not, Gaston. Life has been sent me, the rugged with the smooth, and I must learn to fit myself to both. If I had been clever, I should have learnt my lesson long ago. I must shape myself to things as they are, not want to shape them according to my poor village notions. I was trying to reason about it all just now.'

‘In an attitude that I misunderstood,’ observed Gaston Arbuthnot.

‘I go on my knees when I need to think, clearly and humbly. I would not dare to say at such times that I pray.’

Talk like this was beneath, or above, Gaston Arbuthnot’s level. He told her so plainly.

‘My afternoon has been passed in a thoroughly mundane and grovelling manner, Dinah. I left this house at about three, just when you were giving Lord Rex Basire a lesson in cross-stitch! Since then, I have been spending my time, not in solemn thoughts that required genuflexion, but in listening to the last little version of the last little bit of island gossip. It seems you mean, after all, to go into the world where, as I have often told you, so many more sink than swim. You have accepted Rex Basire’s invitation for the picnic next Wednesday?’

The accusation, if it were one, came with a sharpness of ring foreign to Gaston Arbuthnot’s modulated voice. Dinah’s colour deepened.

‘I have accepted Lord Rex Basire’s invitation for Wednesday—yes.’

‘You cannot, I think, mean to go. The picnic will be a helter-skelter kind of affair. It was got up by these young men in the first instance, more as a frolic than anything else, and——’

‘You are going yourself, are you not, Gaston?’

‘That is uncertain. I believe I did give a conditional consent over the dinner-table, before it was at all sure the thing would come off.’

‘And Mrs. Thorne is going?’

‘Oh, Linda goes everywhere. There is a legend that she and the Doctor dined one night at mess.’

‘And Madame Corbie? Don’t you think a party that is staid enough for an Archdeacon’s wife must be safe for me?’

It was Dinah who spoke; yet the tone, the words, were curiously unlike Dinah’s. Some other woman, surely, stood in the place of her, who during four years had been as wax

to every careless turn of Gaston Arbuthnot's will!

'I can see that you have made up your mind—confess, Dinah, you have run already to Madame Voisin's and ordered your dress for Wednesday?'

She turned away, impatiently, at the question.

'Well, I will not be unwise enough to argue. At least persuade Geoffrey to go too, get Geoffrey to take care of you. Had I been consulted,' remarked Gaston, drily, 'I should have advised you to "come out" anywhere rather than on a yacht hired, in this kind of way, by Lord Rex Basire and his brother subs.'

'Gaston!'

'Oh, not because of the right or wrong of the thing. I don't,' said Gaston, 'go in for transcendental attitudes, morally or physically. My advice would have been simply offered on a matter of taste. You, my love, are doubtless the best judge. What time is it—seven? Then I have scarcely half-an-hour left to dress.'

‘To dress!’ faltered Dinah. ‘And my briar roses, our walk to Roscoff Common? I have been looking forward to it for days. Did you not promise to draw me some real briar roses for the finish of my border?’

‘Of course, I promised, and of course I shall fulfil, my dear child. The Roscoff roses will keep.’

‘And you are going out to dinner again, Gaston?’

‘Only to The Bungalow.’ Mr. Arbuthnot made a move towards the door of his dressing-room. ‘Mrs. Thorne is amiable enough generally to condone a morning-coat. To-night, I believe, there will be more of a party than usual.’

Dinah rested her hand upon her husband’s shoulder, but not with the clinging, imploring touch to which Gaston Arbuthnot was accustomed.

‘If I could have an answer to one question I should be content,’ she exclaimed, almost with passion. ‘It is an answer you can give.

What are Mrs. Thorne's gifts? What is the cleverness which draws a man as difficult to please as you five days a week to her house?'

The situation had become critical. A feverish colour burned on Dinah's face, her question was trenchant and desperately to the point. But it was just the hardest thing imaginable to get Gaston Arbuthnot into a tiptoe posture. The drama of his life, so he himself avowed, consisted, a good nine-tenths of it, of carpenter's scenes. If he were forced to declaim some passage of high and tragic blank-verse it would inevitably sound like a bit of genteel comedy from his lips!

A husband of warmer temper, it would be unjust to say of warmer heart, must have kindled at the daring of Dinah's words, the ardent eagerness of her face.

Gaston Arbuthnot was interested rather than moved. He answered with the chill candour of an impartial judge:

'Linda's gifts? First on the list we must

place the cardinal one of vocal silence. Mrs. Thorne does not sing.'

'She can accompany other people who do,' said Dinah, with imprudent significance.

'And can accompany them well. Have I ever told you, Dinah, how and where I first saw the lady who is now Doctor Thorne's wife?'

'You have not. You have never spoken to me about Mrs. Thorne's life, past or present.'

Dinah's tone was as nearly acrid as her full and rounded quality of voice permitted. She felt intuitively that Gaston would parry her question, as he had so often done before, by apposite narrative which yet led no whither; felt that though every word he spoke might be true to the letter, the one truth of vital moment to herself would be in the words left unspoken.

'It was in Paris, my love, in long past days before I went to Cambridge, and when I was much less of an Englishman than I am now. My mother, with a wholesome dread of my

artist friends, and of the Quartier Latin, cultivated what she called occasions of family life for me. One such occasion came to her hand. Under the same roof with us, but on a lower floor, as befitted their purse, lived a rich Jew family, with a bevy of young daughters and an English governess——'

'Linda Thorne?'

'At that time Linda Smythe. Yes, Linda Constantia was seated at a piano the first evening my mother forced me down to Madame Benjamin's salon. I think I see her now, poor soul, playing accompaniments to the singing—the terrible operatic singing of Papa Benjamin. By-and-by we danced in a round, "Have you seen the baker's girl?" "Mary, soak thy bread in wine," and other mild dances of the unmarried French mees. The governess remained at the piano still. 'Our good Smeet! she knows so well to efface herself,' said Madame Benjamin, giving me a tumbler of sugar-water to present to my countrywoman. I might almost answer your question, Dinah, in Madame

Benjamin's words—Linda Thorne understands perfectly the difficult social art of effacing oneself.'

'Was she effaced at Saturday's rose-show?'

'She was a locum tenens, good-naturedly presiding over the refreshment stall for some friend with a sprained ankle.'

'With an affection of the throat, Gaston. So the story ran, when you first told it me.'

'You are severe, Dinah. If a pretty woman could possibly be tempted into feeling bitterly towards a plain one, I should say that you were bitter towards Linda Thorne.'

Dinah was unsoftened by the compliment.

'To efface oneself,' she repeated. 'That means—in homely, plain English, such as I talk and understand?'

'To keep gracefully in the background while others fill the prominent parts,' said Gaston with a laugh. 'If you knew Linda Thorne better, if you could see her at one of her own charming little parties, you would appreciate the knack she has of not shining.'

She is quite the least selfish, least self-absorbed creature in the world.'

Straight, warm, living, flew a denial from Dinah's lips.

'Mrs. Thorne is wrapt in selfishness! If she was a good, true woman, she must guess how the hearts of other women, other wives, bleed, only at a thought of neglect! I can't cope with her, Gaston, for conversation. She was born and educated a lady, and I belong to the working people, less taught when I was a child than they are now. But that should make her generous. She is rich in good things—has she not got little Rahnee? And I have but the hope, weak that hope grows at times, of keeping your love.'

A flush of annoyance overspread Gaston Arbuthnot's handsome face.

'If you would only take life in a quieter spirit, Dinah, content yourself with the moment's common happiness, like the rest of us! I speak in kindness, my dear girl.' Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot here fell to examining his signet-

ring closely, perhaps because he did not wish to meet his wife's eyes. 'If you would care for any mortal thing, in addition to that somewhat unworthy person, Gaston Arbuthnot, it would be better for us both.'

Dinah turned deadly white.

'If the child had lived!' she uttered. 'If we had her now, nearly the age of Rahnee, my heart would not be so athirst for love. It would come to me, naturally. Just as I am, no cleverer, or brighter, or more original, you might find my company sufficient, if we had the child.'

'We cannot cut out our lives by our own pattern,' said Gaston, with irrefragable philosophy. 'The disappointment, God knows, was bitterly keen to both of us at the time. Looking round the world, now, I am disposed to wonder sometimes, if the possession of a child be an unmixed blessing.'

'It would have been so to me.' The wound had never so thoroughly healed that Dinah could bear a careless touch on the cic-

trice. 'But I have no right to complain'—she said this through her tears—'God gave, and took away. Who am I to question His wisdom?'

During several seconds Mr. Arbuthnot seemed to grow more and more absorbed in the contemplation of his ring; then, by an alert side movement, he contrived to reach the door of his dressing-room.

'You are going? You intend really to dine with the Thornes this evening?'

Dinah brushed her hand hastily across her eyes.

'Certainly, I intend to keep my engagement,' answered Gaston Arbuthnot.

'You would not break it, if I asked you?'

'I would do any conceivable thing you asked me—with sufficient cause. I have too much opinion of your good taste to dread your ever placing yourself, or me, in a ridiculous position.'

'If you would, I should give up all this plan for Wednesday. We would go back'—a

soft far-off look stole over Dinah's face as though for a moment she indulged in the retrospect of some too-dear dream—'go back—ah! fool that I am—to the early days, days when you said the best dinner-party in London could not tempt you to leave me for an evening.'

While she was speaking, she had followed him. Her hand rested on his sleeve. Her eyes, with piteous, imploring earnestness, sought to read his face.

'There is no returning to old days,' said Gaston Arbuthnot. 'People of our age should have sense enough to realise this. The exclusive boy-and-girl idolatry of one year of life would be rank absurdity in a dignified Darby and Joan of our standing.'

Dinah shrank away from him. Perhaps it occurred to her that exclusive idolatry had never existed at all on Gaston's side. How long, in truth, did he keep to the declaration, made in his honeymoon, of preferring quiet evenings with her to the best dinner-parties in London?

‘When I came in just now, Dinah, I interrupted you at some spiritual exercise, not high enough to be called prayer, yet that required a kneeling attitude. It is a pity,’ said Mr. Arbuthnot, looking disagreeable, ‘that the self-communings of good people so seldom lead them to charity—I don’t mean almsgiving—I mean a broader, more charitable frame of mind. If you could only recognise one fact, that there is a great variety of human nature about you in the world, it would be something gained.’

‘I know it, Gaston. What I want is to be lifted out of my own narrow ignorance.’

‘Take Geoffrey, for instance. In Geoffrey we have a man sound to the core. No caprice, no vanity, in our cousin, none of the discontent and levity, and thirst for amusement which disfigure some characters that might be named. For contrast,’ Gaston Arbuthnot’s eyes rested discerningly on his wife, ‘look at Rex Basire—an empty-skulled little tailor’s block doubtless, yet with a brave soldier’s heart in him all the

same! By-the-by, my dear, I need not exhort you,' he added, lightly, 'to be charitable to Lord Rex. If women would only be as fair towards each other as they are towards us! I really admired the philosophy with which you gave that young gentleman his lesson in cross-stitch to-day.'

The careless tone of banter brought back Dinah's accustomed self-control. Nothing so effectually checks emotion as the absence of emotion in our fellow-actors.

'Lord Rex was bent upon working three or four stitches in my ottoman. It cost me the trouble only of unpicking them, and when he asked my leave, I was ignorant, I always am ignorant about the politeness of saying "No." That is what I must learn.'

'The art of saying "No,"' observed Mr. Arbuthnot, not in a very hearty voice.

'The art of speaking and acting—well, as Mrs. Thorne, as every woman of your world, would do! There's no going back to old days, Gaston. You are right there. I must shape

myself to things as they are, not try to shape them to my needs. That is chiefly why I accepted the invitation for Wednesday. I mean to learn from the example of others. I mean to turn over a new leaf from to-day.'

'Keep true to your own transparent self, child. Be what you have been always, and I, for one, shall be contented.'

CHAPTER V.

'JAMES LEE'S WIFE.'

THE speech was really the best chosen, prettiest thing that a somewhat errant husband could have found to say. In every moral encounter that befel Gaston Arbuthnot, and whether his antagonist floundered in the mud or no, Gaston seemed invariably to find himself at the last in a graceful attitude. But Dinah's heart was no more warmed by honeyed little phrases than by the reconciliatory kiss her husband bestowed on her, ere he started to his dinner-party. She was reaching—nay, had reached—the miserable stage when honeyed phrases and reconciliatory kisses are in themselves matters of distrust! How, her lonely dinner over, would she get through the evening hours—long

counted-on hours—when she was to have walked, her hand within Gaston's arm, to distant Roscoff Common for her briar roses.

For a space Dinah looked listlessly forth at the garden. It was full of people who knew each other, who talked together in friendly voices—the boarders of the hotel, with whom Gaston mixed, with whom Gaston was popular. Then she seated herself before her embroidery frame. But recollections of Lord Rex Basire, of the effaced stitches, of Gaston's commentaries on her 'patience,' made the thought of work repugnant to her. If she could only read, she thought! Not after her dull, country pattern, repeating each word to herself as a child cons his task, ere he can take in its meaning. If she could read for pleasure, as she had watched Geoffrey read—quickly, easily, with hearty human interest, like one bent on receiving counsel from some well-beloved friend!

A book of Geff's lay on the mantelshelf. Dinah rose, crossed the room with languid steps, and took it in her hand. Then, as

readers invariably do, to whom the shell of a book matters more than the kernel, she fell to a careful examination of the text, binding, title-page.

‘The Poetical Works of Robert Browning.
Vol. VI. *Dramatis Personæ*.’

Well, four years ago, during the brief fortnight of Geoffrey’s madness, it chanced one evening that he walked out to Lesser Cheriton with this very book in his pocket. (Did some ineffaceable rose odour of that dead June cling to the pages still, rendering Vol. VI. dearer in Geff’s imagination than its fellows?) He read ‘James Lee’s Wife’ aloud to Dinah Thurston—a poem totally outside the girl’s comprehension—and during the recital of which her decently suppressed yawns must have rebuffed any man less blindly in love than was Geoffrey Arbuthnot.

At ‘James Lee’s Wife’ the book opened now.

‘Ah, Love, but a day,
And the world has changed!’

Dinah read through the first stanzas untouched. Pretty love-warblings, the cry of a happy woman's heart,—what had they to say to her, Dinah Arbuthnot? In the last stanza of 'By the Fireside' her pulse gave a leap.

*'Did a woman ever—would I knew!—
Watch the man——'*

Dinah went back to the window, the volume in her hand. She returned to the beginning of the poem, pored over it, line by line, stanza by stanza, in the fading light.

*'Yet this turns now to a fault—there! there!
That I do love, watch too long,
And wait too well, and weary and wear;
And 'tis all an old story, and my despair
Fit subject for some new song.'*

And when she had got thus far, the clouds of her ignorance lightened. She began to understand.

Shortly before ten o'clock entered Geoffrey. The parlour lamps were not lit. Dinah's figure was in dense shadow as she leaned, absorbed in her own thoughts, beside the open window.

Geoffrey believing the room empty, sang under his breath, as he groped his way across to the mantelshelf: no very distinguishable tune—an ear for music was not among Geff's gifts—but with sufficient of a quick, triplet measure in it to recall a Spanish Barcadero that Marjorie Bartrand was fond of singing to herself.

To Dinah's sick heart the song was consciously wounding.

She had been so long used to Geff's undivided homage, that sense of power had, little by little, grown into tyranny, gentle rose-leaf tyranny, whose weight Geoffrey's broad shoulders bore without effort, and yet having in its nature one of tyranny's inalienable qualities, lack of justice.

'Always in spirits, Geoffrey!' The reproach came to him through the gloom. 'It is good to think, whether the day is dark or shining, our cousin Geoffrey can always sing.'

Geoffrey was at her side in a moment.

'It is cruel to speak of my horrible groanings as singing, Mrs. Arbuthnot, crueller still

to hint of them as betokening good spirits. Where is Gaston? You are back earlier than I expected from your walk to Roscoff.'

'The walk fell through. I shall have to border my work with a rose pattern bought in the shops. Gaston was obliged to dine at Dr. Thorne's. He made the engagement, of course, without thinking of our walk. I ought never to have counted on those Roscoff wild roses. I——'

Dinah's voice lapsed, brokenly, into silence.

'If you would like the roses, you can have them by breakfast to-morrow,' said Geoffrey. 'Few things I should enjoy better than a six-mile trudge in the early morning.'

'No, Geoffrey, no. Gaston always tells me that my bought patterns are atrocious, and the walk was planned by him, and he was to have sketched from the fresh briars by lamplight. My heart in it all is over. The Roscoff roses may go!'

As so much of weightier delight had been allowed to go, negligently, irrevocably, out of

Dinah Arbuthnot's life. Dinah herself might not suggest the thought, but to Geoffrey's mind it was a vivid, a pathetic one.

‘And why should you not take my escort? You know I am never burthened with engagements. Let us go to Roscoff to-morrow. You owe Miss Bartrand a visit. Well, we will take Tintajeux on our road, and make Marjorie show us the way to Roscoff Common.’

‘Miss Bartrand will not expect me to return her visit. She came here because—because you, dear Geff, with or without words, bade her come! I should never have courage to face the grandfather. Gaston would be the right person to call on the Seigneur of Tintajeux.’

‘The Seigneur of Tintajeux might think otherwise,’ Geoffrey laughed. ‘Old Andros Bartrand made minute inquiries about Mrs. Gaston Arbuthnot the last time I saw him.’

‘About me—always the same story!’ cried Dinah, uneasily. ‘Why should people talk of us? What is there in my life, or in Gaston's, that need arouse so much curiosity?’

‘ Shall I answer as your friend, Lord Rex, would do ? ’

‘ Answer truly, Geff, not like Lord Rex Basire, but like yourself.’

‘ Why should the good people of Guernsey talk about you, do you ask ? Because, Mrs. Arbuthnot, even in this country of fair faces, yours may have gained the reputation of being the fairest.’

The speech would have fitted Lord Rex better. Geff was sensible in the darkness that his cheek reddened.

‘ The fairest ! ’ echoed poor Dinah, petulantly. ‘ Oh, I sicken of the very word “ fair.” Shades of hair or of eyes, a white skin, a straight profile, how can people think twice of these trivial things ? The woman best worth speaking about in Guernsey or elsewhere should be she, not with the fairest, but the happiest face.’

Her own, certainly, was not happy to-night. Growing accustomed to the parlour’s darkness, fitfully broken by a reflected light from one of

the garden lamps outside, Geff could note her exceeding pallor. He could note, also, that Dinah Arbuthnot's eyes revealed no trace of tear-shedding, that a look rather of newly-stirred interest, of awakening excitement, was in their depths.

‘And you have spent your evening, not only without Gaston, but without cross-stitch? It is a fresh experience,’ he told her gravely, ‘for you to be idle.’

‘I read until the light went—don’t you see—I have got hold of a book of yours? A book of verses that I did not understand when you tried to read it aloud to me at Lesser Cheriton.’

Ah, how the old name, spoken by her tongue, stabbed him always! Geoffrey Arbuthnot bent his face above the volume in Dinah’s hand.

“Robert Browning.” But for my bad reading, you ought to have liked these poems four years ago.’

‘I think not, Geff. Uneducated people

can like only where they feel. And in those young days,'—oh, unconsciously cruel Dinah! —'I felt so little. But I have an object, now, in learning. I want to learn on all subjects, out of books as well as from life. That reminds me of something I had to say to you, Geff. Lord Rex Basire was calling on me this afternoon.'

'Lord Rex Basire was calling on you the greater part of yesterday.'

'And I took upon myself to accept an invitation for you. There will be a picnic party on Wednesday. It is some yachting expedition to the French coast, got up by the officers of the regiment, to which you will be asked——'

'But to which I shall certainly not go. I can get as far out to sea as I like with the fisher people. Wednesday is one of my busiest days.'

'Miss Bartrand will be invited, too, if you are thinking of her.'

'Miss Bartrand can do as she chooses. I

have more important work than my two hours' reading at Tintajeux.'

'If I ask you, Geff, will you refuse?'

'I refuse, unconditionally. I hate gay parties. What mortal interest could I have in the society of men like Lord Rex Basire and his brother officers?'

'Only that I am going, that Gaston . . . I mean, I looked upon it as a matter of course you would accept, and——'

The words died on Dinah's lips. She had an unreasoning sensation that her firmest safety ground was at this moment cut abruptly from her feet.

As she stood, faltering, uncertain, Geoffrey took the volume of Browning from her. It opened at page 58.

'Little girl with the poor coarse hand.'

There was just sufficient light for him to make out the letters of the first line.

'Is this the poem you have been reading, Mrs. Arbuthnot? Why, I distinctly remember

your pronouncing "James Lee's Wife" to be meaningless.'

'I have my lesson—shall understand,' said Dinah. "'James Lee's Wife" is the story of a woman whose heart is broken.'

And she turned from him. Geoffrey could only see her face in extreme profile. The cheek with its drawn oval, the exquisite, sad lips, showed in strong relief, like a cheek, like lips of marble, against the night sky.

He first broke silence.

'Do you care, seriously—do you care a fraction, one way or the other—about my accepting this invitation of Basire's for Wednesday?' he asked her. 'Is it possible my going could be of help to you?'

A big lump in poor Dinah's throat kept her, during some moments, from speaking. Then with trembling eagerness her answer broke forth. She cared more seriously than she could say 'about Geoffrey's not forsaking her.' Gaston, of course, would be of the party, but then Gaston was so popular, so sure to be

unapproachable! She would never, never want Geoffrey to martyrise himself again. It was the first great favour she had asked him. When she was once launched in the world, said Dinah, rallying with effort, she would know what to say and do and look, unhelped by a prompter.

And all Geff's hatred for gay parties, and for men like Lord Rex Basire and his brother officers, went to the winds. That Dinah was beginning to anatomise her pain unhelped by suggestion from without, that Dinah had grasped the subtle meaning of 'James Lee's Wife,' were facts that could not be lightly put aside. Her cry to himself, Geoffrey thought, was that of a child who seeks succour, from instinct, rather than from knowledge of his danger.

'The martyrdom would not last long,' urged Dinah, misjudging his intention. 'To any one so fond of the sea as you, Geff, twelve or fifteen hours on board a steamer are not much. We are to leave early in the morning and be

back in Guernsey the following night. If you know what a kindness you would be doing me !'

'I mean to go,' said Geff Arbuthnot, shortly.

Twelve hours ! He felt, just then, that he would pass twelve weeks, or months, on a steamer, if by so doing he could lighten one ounce of Dinah's burthens to her !

'And Gaston's conscience will be at rest,' she exclaimed. 'The truth is, you see, Gaston was not well pleased at my accepting at all. He bade me ask you, Geoffrey, to look after me.'

To a more sophisticated mind than Geff's it might have occurred that the most fitting man to look after Gaston Arbuthnot's wife would be—Gaston Arbuthnot himself.

CHAPTER VI.

‘IS MY VIRGIL PASSABLE?’

I HAVE written that, in a softened and remorseful moment Marjorie Bartrand's heart owned Geoffrey for its master.

In a character like Marjorie's, softened and remorseful moods are apt, however, to be intermittent. On the evening of Saturday her pride had melted, ay, to such a point that, holding her tutor's 'love-letter' between her hands, she went into a storm of penitent tears—she, Marjorie Bartrand, whose boast had been that there was one woman in Her British Majesty's domain who would shed tears for no man while she lived!

Looking back upon these things from the cool and bracing heights of a Tintajeux Sunday,

the girl's stout spirit recoiled with derision from the image of her own weakness. The Seigneur's after-dinner sarcasm, she felt, with tingling cheek, was true of aim. She *had* played a part, unknowingly, in the Arbuthnot drama: thanks to Cassandra Tighe, had no doubt treated Geoffrey with kindness not his due for the imaginary wife's sake! Now would everything be on a frigidly proper footing. Her tutor had shown very good sense in returning property that had wrongly fallen into his keeping. Whatever small halo of romance hung around his life was dispelled. The construction of Latin prose, the working out of mathematical problems, would henceforth go on with dignified and scholarlike serenity.

But, as a first step, Geoffrey Arbuthnot should hear the truth!

Old Andros happened to give a longer sermon than usual on this Sunday morning of June 26—a sermon wearing a French garb now, but which was first preached fifty years ago before the University of Oxford, and whose

polished sentences breathed the safe and sleepy theology of its day. The whole of the congregation slept, save one; the gentlemanly optimism of eighteen hundred and thirty appealing moderately to hearers who in the evening would revive beneath the burning eloquence of some neighbouring Bethesda or Zion. Marjorie, only, was awake: keen, restless, preternaturally stirred to mundane thoughts and desires as she had ever found herself, from her rebellious babyhood upward, under the inspiration of a high oak pew and monumental slabs. She thought over all her hours with Geoffrey from the first evening when she saw him in the Tintajoux drawing-room until their half quarrel on Saturday. She thought of her visit to Dinah, of the disillusionment wrought in her by the vision of French song-books and yellow-backed novels. She thought of the moment when she rescued her letter from the Seigneur's hands! Happily, the comedy of errors approached its finish! Geoffrey Arbuthnot should hear the truth, should have his

masculine vanity soothed by no further misinterpretation of her conduct. Into a debateable land where a mature woman, her heart already touched, had shrunk from venturing, Marjorie, with the madcap courage of seventeen, resolved to rush.

As a first step, Geoffrey Arbuthnot should hear the truth !

And this resolution, formed in the dim religious light of the Tintajoux family pew, did not melt away, like too many excellent Sunday purposes, under the secular warmth of work-a-day open air. When Geoffrey walked into Marjorie's schoolroom on Tuesday morning he found Grim Fate, in a pink chintz frock, with blossoming maidenly face, ready to place him in the outer cold for ever.

'Good-day to you, Mr. Arbuthnot.' The girl held herself stiffly upright, with smileless lips, with hands safely embedded in the pockets of her pinafore. 'I was much obliged to you for returning my ribbon on Saturday, but I need not have put you to the trouble, to the

expense of postage! I could have waited until to-day.'

Geoffrey, a backward interpreter always of feminine petulancy, sought for no latent meaning in her words. Marjorie Bartrand had never looked sweeter to him than now, in her fresh summer frock, with a livelier damask than usual on her cheeks, and with her hands cruelly holding back from their wonted friendly greeting. He had it not in his heart, on this June morning, to find a fault in her, inheritress of all the sins of all the Bartrands though she might be.

'My poverty is heinous, Miss Bartrand, but I could just afford the penny stamp required for the postage of your waist-belt. After the lecture you read me on Saturday morning,' went on Geff, good humouredly, 'I really dared not face you with that morsel of ribbon still in my possession.'

Marjorie's lips lost their firmness. Taking her place at the schoolroom table, she cleared her throat twice. Then she pushed across a

pile of copy-books in Geoffrey’s direction. She signed to him to be seated, presented him with a bundle of pens, drew forward the inkstand. Finally, intrenched, as it were, behind the implements which defined their social relationship, she delivered herself of the following singular confession :

‘When my lecture, as you please to call it, was given I did not know that *you* existed, Mr. Geoffrey Arbuthnot.’

‘Miss Bartrand !’

‘The lecture was meant, in good faith, for another person. If an apology is needed, there you have it ! I—I had listened to idle gossip,’ said Marjorie, taking desperate courage at the sound of her own voice, ‘and so—I must say it out, little though I like such subjects—I thought you were a married man, sir. I thought so from the first evening you came here. I thought so until the hour when I saw Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot at the rose-show.’

‘And your motives—when you called on

Dinah?' exclaimed Geoffrey, thrown off his guard.

'When I called on Mrs. Arbuthnot I believed her to be my tutor's wife. I had heard a great deal about her goodness and her beauty. And I had almost grown to hate you,' added Marjorie, with one of her terrible bursts of outspokenness, 'for leaving such a woman as Dinah at home, neglected, while you amused yourself.'

Then she lifted her eyes. She was startled to see how Geoffrey Arbuthnot's face had paled; paled under the incivility, so Marjorie supposed, of her speech.

'As a fact, of course, I never hated you at all.' Her voice shook a little. 'That gentle, beautiful Mrs. Arbuthnot is not your wife.'

'Not my wife,' echoed poor Geoffrey absently.

His tone was chill. Dipping a pen in the ink, he began to trace meaningless curves and lines on the cover of the exercise-book nearest his hand. During a few seconds

he was obviously unmindful of his pupil's presence.

'Her lips, with their sad expression, haunt me,' remarked Marjorie presently. 'Mrs. Gaston Arbuthnot, I should think, must be the most beautiful woman in the world.'

'As she is certainly the truest and best.' Geff had got back his self-possession. He spoke his credo as valiantly as though Marjorie Bartrand's eyes were not fixed upon him. 'And so,' he found voice to say, 'you would actually believe, on hearsay evidence, that a girl like Dinah would have chosen me for her husband, and I—have neglected her?'

Geoffrey laughed, not very joyously, then taking up another copy-book he glanced with mechanical show of attention over a sentence or two of Marjorie's Latin translation. He held the page upside down,—a fact which her memory, in after times, might recall as significant.

'I honestly believed you to be married. Have you forgotten the first evening you

walked out to Tintajeux—that evening when I told you the Bon Espoir was a good omen for our friendship?’

‘A fortnight ago to-day. I have not forgotten it.’

‘I looked upon you as my friend before I saw you. I had heard your history—the history, it would seem, of your cousin Gaston! I honoured a man who had had the courage of his opinions. I respected, I drew to you on account of the wife you had chosen. And now, Mr. Arbuthnot,’ exclaimed Marjorie hotly, ‘the comedy of errors is finished. I have learned my mistake, you see. And I trust that my apology has been sufficient.’

This time Geoffrey broke into a fit of wholesome, unconstrained laughter.

‘I am afraid I see through everything, Miss Bartrand. Your apologies say too much.’ I have been treated with humanity by accident, and may count upon dark days for the future. That I am not married is my misfortune,’ he added, watching her face, ‘a misfortune which,

if I could only thereby re-establish myself in your favour, I would gladly remedy.’

‘Would you? . . . do you mean . . .’

And then, looking up into her tutor’s eyes, Marjorie knew that they were both of them talking un wisdom, were trenching as nearly on the forbidden ground of sentiment as a young man and woman who had met for the hard study of classics and mathematics could well do.

‘I believe I got through some fair work, yesterday,’ she remarked, with an air of cold business. ‘As to-morrow is to be wasted on folly, we may as well lose no time now. It is your system never to praise, sir,—a good one, doubtless. Yet I hope you will think my Virgil passable. I *promise* you it was done without the crib.’

Geff read the halting translation aloud, no longer holding the manuscript upside down. He did not think Marjorie’s Virgil passable, and put the copy-book aside without a word of comment. He showed himself severer than usual over Greek aorists, was stringent, to

cruelty, in regard of Marjorie's shakiest point, her mathematics. But at last when the professional work was over, when he had risen to take leave, Geoffrey Arbuthnot extended his hand to his pupil as the girl's heart knew he had never done before.

'You have tolerated me hitherto,' he observed, 'for my imaginary wife's sake. Do you think you can tolerate me, in future, for my own?'

With his eyes fixed on her face, her small fingers crushed in his grasp, Marjorie's cheeks turned the colour of a pomegranate.

'You know . . . you ought to have been the other Arbuthnot cousin,' she stammered, glancing up under her long lashes, then drawing her hand away, warily.

'I ought, you think, to have been Gaston? He would never have pleaded, as I plead, for toleration. Every woman living would tolerate Gaston of her own free will.'

'Save Marjorie Bartrand! Pray make one exception to your rule. I come of an

arbitrary and stiff-necked race. We—we Tintajeux people belong to minorities. We like, in most cases dislike, where we can.'

'Give me credit, for a short time longer, of being the other Arbuthnot cousin,' Geoffrey whispered as he left her. 'Dislike me only as much as you did on that first evening when you gathered roses and heliotropes—for my wife!'

CHAPTER VII.

LINDA AS AN ART CRITIC.

WEDNESDAY morning's sun rose cloudless. A few persistent fog wreaths lay, even as the day advanced, to leeward of the islands. There was an undue ground-swell, although the surface of the water glistened, smooth as oil, when the high spring tide began to flow in from the Atlantic. None but an inveterate croaker could, however, prophesy actual mischief from signs so trivial. Lord Rex Basire declared aloud—certain of his guests arriving not as the time for departure drew nigh—that the day must have been manufactured expressly for the subalterns' picnic. No wind, no sea, a nicely tempered sun above one's head, a favourable tide—'What more,' asked Lord Rex, 'espe-

cially if one add the item of a powerful steamer, could the never satisfied heart of woman require?’

The heart of the most Venerable woman in the island required that there should be neither ground-swell nor fog-bank. At the eleventh hour came an excuse, on the score of weather, from Madame Corbie. The post of chaperon-in-chief stood vacant. Happily for the youthful hosts, Rosie Verschoyle’s mother was faithful—a little white passive lady, accustomed to the iron rule of grown-up daughters, who only stipulated that she should lie down, within reach of smelling-salts, before leaving Guernsey harbour, and neither be spoken to nor looked at until they arrived in smooth water off the coast of France. Old Cassandra, in her scarlet cloak, was to the fore, with cans for fish, with crooks for sea-weed, with a butterfly-net, with stoppered bottles—Cassandra, burthened by a sole regret—that she had left her harp behind. If these young people had wished, in mid ocean, to dance, how willingly would Cassandra

have harped to them! Doctor Thorne and his Linda were punctual; so were the trio of pretty de Carteret sisters whom poor Mrs. Verschoyle, according to a trite figure of speech, was to 'look after.' And still Rex Basire glanced vainly along the harbour road for the only guests concerning whose advent he cared. The steam was up; the skipper stood ready on the bridge. In another ten minutes the *Princess* of necessity must quit her moorings, and still the sunshine of Dinah Arbuthnot's face was wanting.

'You look frightfully careworn, Lord Rex,' said Rosie Verschoyle with malicious intonation, as she followed the direction of his glances. 'Pray, has your lobster salad not arrived? Is your ice melting? Or does some anxiety even yet more tragic disturb your peace?'

'There they are—no, by Jove! only the men. Twelve feet two of the Arbuthnot cousins!' exclaimed Lord Rex, with frank disrespect of Rosie's sympathy. 'Is it possible

Mrs. Arbuthnot can have thrown us over? The thought is too atrocious !’

The tall figures of Gaston and Geoffrey—twelve feet two of the Arbuthnot cousins—were descending by quick strides the stepway that forms a short cut from the High Town of Petersport to the quay. Before Rex Basire’s disappointment had had time to formulate itself more coherently, a clatter of ponies’ hoofs, a rush of wheels, made themselves heard round the corner of the adjacent harbour road. A few instants later, and the welcomest sight the world could, just then, have offered to Lord Rex was before him : Marjorie Bartrand, in her pony carriage, and at Marjorie’s side, fairer than all summer mornings that ever dawned, the blushing lovely face of Dinah Arbuthnot.

‘ Have we to apologise? Are we really behind our time?’ cried Gaston, as Lord Rex came forward to welcome them at the gangway. ‘ It has been a case of the fox and the goose and the bunch of grapes. My wife would not

start without Miss Bartrand ; Geff would not start without my wife. I was not allowed to start alone. The most delightful weather!—and the most delightful party,’ added Gaston, looking at the sunlit world around him with his pleasantest expression. ‘Miss Verschoyle, the Miss de Carterets—Marjorie Bartrand ! Why, all the pretty faces in Guernsey are assembled on board the *Princess* !’

The four or five hours that followed were hours destined to be marked with a red letter in the calendar of Dinah’s life. She felt the youth at her heart, enjoyed the salt freshness of the morning, entered into the mirth and spirit of the expedition like a child. Gaston’s conduct was unexceptionable. Before they had quitted the harbour, he took his place beside his wife—jotting down each new effect of sky or wave or passing fishing boat in his note-book. He remained beside her throughout the voyage. The pretty island girls, capital sailors all of them, chatted in picturesque twos and threes with their bachelor

hosts. Lord Rex Basire devoted himself, with a show of perfect impartiality, to every one.

If this was growing used to the perils of a factitious world, the first plunge into a social vortex where more neophytes sink than swim, Dinah found the process distinctly pleasant. And I am afraid the thought of Linda, effaced for once, in grim earnestness, by all-effacing sea-sickness down below, failed to take the edge off Mrs. Gaston Arbuthnot's enjoyment.

Herm, with its fringe of shell-spangled sands, was soon left behind. The high table-land of Sark became a fairy-like vision, hanging suspended, as on Mahomet's thread, between heaven and sea, ere it vanished out of ken. After an hour's steady steaming, Alderney's tall cliffs were sighted through the haze; and then, shortly before one, the south-west swell gave signs of lessening. The *Princess* was to leeward of the Point of Barfleur, and lunch, served after a desultory and scrambling fashion, began to find hearty welcome among the watchers on deck.

At the cheery whizzing of champagne corks old Doctor Thorne aroused himself from a comfortable siesta he had been enjoying in the bows, and came aft. The sight of Linda's husband, a tumbler of Moet in his hand, his pug-gareed hat pushed back from his sun-shrivalled Indian visage, brought back the thought of Linda Thorne to the general mind.

'Mrs. Thorne! Shall Mrs. Thorne not have champagne sent to her?' cried Gaston, who was reclining, a picture of virtuous contentment, beside his wife. 'Or, better still, now that we have a smooth deck, Doctor, shall Mrs. Thorne not come up into the light of day?'

The old Doctor shook his head as he accepted a goodly plate of lobster salad from the steward's boy.

'Poor girl! My poor dear Lin! A typically severe case of mal de mer always. Stop a bit—no hurry—just give me a trifle more of the dressing. I have collected a mass of data about sea-sick persons,' observed the Doctor, draining down his champagne, with relish, 'and I am

wholly against any attempt at nourishing them. Quite a mistake to administer stimulants. (Thank you, Lord Rex, you may give me another quarter of a tumbler of your excellent Moet.) A mistake to imagine persons as sea-sick as my poor wife can digest anything.'

'I think you are disgracefully heartless, Doctor,' cried Rosie Verschoyle, in her thin gay accents. 'Mrs. Thorne and dear mamma must require wine much more than all we well people. I declare it is positively shameful to think how we have been enjoying the voyage while they were in misery. Now, who will help me carry something to our poor martyrs below?'

'Who,' of course, meant Lord Rex Basire. Following the airy flutter of Rosie Verschoyle's dress, Lord Rex dutifully assisted in conveying biscuits, champagne, and sympathetic messages to the martyrs—as far as the cabin door. Though the deck was smooth, Linda showed coyness as to returning thither. Her belief in human nature, especially in Gaston Arbuthnot's human nature, was, I fear, frailish. The livid

cheeks, pale lips, and sunken eyes of recent sea-sickness were tests to which Linda, under no conditions, would have dreamt of exposing a sentimental friendship!

‘Mrs. Thorne is quite too good—the dearest, most unselfish creature living!’ Rosie Verschoyle announced these little facts before all hearers, on her return to upper air. ‘Doctor Thorne, I hope you are listening to my praises of your wife. Mrs. Thorne is not ill, not very ill herself, but she will not leave my poor frightened mother for a moment. I call that real, quiet heroism. In glorious weather like this to remain shut up in the cabin of a steamer for another person’s sake!’

‘Our good Smeet! She knows so well to efface herself.’

There was a twinkle in Gaston Arbuthnot’s shrewd eyes. Possibly, as Rosie Verschoyle spoke, the words of Madame Benjamin’s eulogy came back to him.

A league or two beyond Barfleur a French pilot was signalled for, the pilotage from the

Point to Langrune being tortuous and difficult. Does the reader know the fairness of that little-visited strip of Norman coast? Fairness at its zenith, perhaps, in April, when the orchards bordering the shore are heavy with white pear, or rose-pink apple bloom; when the black-thorn blossoms so lavishly that, if the wind be south, you may distinguish whiffs of the wild, half-bitter aroma far out at sea. But exquisite, too, on a late June day like this, the yellow colza in full harvest, the barley-fields ready for the sickle, the Caen-stone spires and homesteads standing out in white relief against the level horizon-line of sky.

A French pilot was signalled for. After his coming the *Princess* steamed slower and ever slower eastward. By-and-by—Langrune already visible across the expanse of yellowish sea—it became observable that the vessel's movement could scarce be felt by those on board. The skipper stood consulting with the pilot on the bridge, the figures of the men at the wheel were motionless. There was a

simultaneous hush in everybody's talk, a momentary tension of the breath at the thought of something happening! And then came the blank, unmistakable order, 'Stop her!' Before leaving Petersport wrong reckoning had been made as to the difference between the hour of ebb in Guernsey and along the coast of France; the skipper had no choice but to anchor. Would the passengers await the turn of the tide and deeper water, or land, by help of the boats, on some rocks within easy reach, and trust to getting ashore across a tract of wide wet sand as best they might?

The stout-nerved Guernsey girls, accustomed to scores of bigger adventures at sand-eeling parties and conger expeditions, laughed at the horrors of the position. With Cassandra Tighe as leader, these young women announced their determination of reaching the shore forthwith, though not dry-footed. Among the chaperons arose murmurs of contumacy. Poor Mrs. Verschoyle, a ghastly figure, emerging tremulously from the cabin, observed that she

looked on all voluntary sea-going excursions as a tempting of Providence. With a spot like L'Ancrese Common, not three miles from Petersport—L'Ancrese Common, where one could have had the society of our excellent Archdeacon and of Madame Corbie—*why*, said Mrs. Verschoyle, with the acerbity of mortal digestive revolt—why put oneself at the mercy of tides and pilots at all?

Old Doctor Thorne was flatly rebellious. There was good champagne on board the *Princess*, thought the Doctor. There were Burmese cheroots—a warm sun. There was the ultimate certainty of floating up with the tide.

‘If any one be at a loss how to pass the afternoon hours let him take a siesta, or inquire if the skipper have a pack of cards stowed away. You see the wisdom of my remarks, I am sure, Lin, do you not?’

‘I see the wisdom of them for you and me, my dear,’ said Lin, graciously. Under cover of a doubly folded gauze veil, protected by rice

powder, a parasol, a well adjusted Indian shawl, Linda Thorne had at length committed herself to the cruel eye of noon. 'My own election is to abide by Mrs. Verschoyle, whatever happens. I am afraid we shall hardly win over the young ones, Robbie, to our staid philosophy.'

'If Rosie and the Miss de Carterets land I shall land,' said Mrs. Verschoyle, with dreary resignation.

The poor little lady's elder daughters were married. She had three girls in the school-room still. She had also boys. Chaperonage at balls and picnics, nursing of measles or scarlatina, love affairs, school bills, breakages, all came to Mrs. Verschoyle as the burthens of her widowed, many childrened lot, heavy burthens to be borne under sorrowful protest. 'If the picnic had only been at L'Ancrese Common,' she repeated, 'we should have the Archdeacon and Madame Corbie with us, and need never have got wet shoes at all.'

A consultation with the skipper resulted in

a general lowering of the boats. A quarter of an hour later the whole of the party, save the Doctor, were landed on the Smaller Cancale, a reef of rock separated by a mile of treacherous sands from terra firma, and upon whose limited area a crowd of Parisians of both sexes were fishing—no, were following ‘la pêche’ (the terms are not convertible)—after the guise and in the vestments sacred to the Parisian heart.

Mrs. Verschoyle sank down on the first slippery point of rock that presented itself, vainly wishing, little though she loved the steamer, that her maternal duties had allowed her to remain there with the Doctor and the sailors. Cassandra Tighe started off, the lightest-hearted of the party, perhaps, to hunt for zoophytes and molluscs among the tide pools. The younger people, all, pronounced themselves in favour of an exploring walk inland before dinner—all except Mrs. Thorne.

‘I mean to look after your mother, Rosie,’ said Linda, removing her double folds of gauze, as she took her place at the elder lady’s side.

‘Please let me indulge my Indian laziness. Some one, positively, ought to stay with dear Mrs. Verschoyle, and I like to be that some one. It makes me remember my queer old governess days to find myself among Parisians.’ Linda was prone to these little bursts of retrospective humility. ‘And then, there is my husband! Robbie, no doubt, will eventually drift up with the tide. Quite too charming to leave all us, sober elders, together.’

‘Sober elders’—so Dinah realised with a contracting heart—was a sufficiently elastic term to embrace Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot. Before landing from the boats, Gaston, with keen artistic vision, had descried some marvellously pretty fisher-girl among the crowd of French people on the rocks. Not a real red-handed, rough-haired fisher-girl, but the latest Worth idea of a duly got-up pêcheuse, the very subject, Gaston declared, for his own meretricious pencil. He must make a stealthy study of her forthwith. And indeed, at this present moment, not many paces distant from Mrs. Verschoyle

and her devoted friend, Gaston Arbuthnot, sketch-book in hand, was already at work.

Dinah lingered aimlessly. The desire of her heart was to stay beside her husband. Her pleasure would have been to watch his quick, clever pencil, to hear him discourse, in his light strain, about these foreigners, whose theatrical manners and dress, overwhelming to her in her ignorance, must to him be familiar. She felt that the brightness of her day would be clouded if she left Gaston ! And yet, mused Dinah, troubled of spirit, *do* wives, in society, hang jealously at their husband's elbow, or watch their pencil, or listen to their talk with delight ? Would she expose herself—far worse, would she expose Gaston to ridicule, by shirking the walking party ?

An expressive glance, shot from Mr. Arbuthnot's eyes, set these questionings only too sharply at rest.

‘ Look carefully in through the cottage windows, Dinah.’ He bestowed on her a little valedictory wave of two fingers. ‘ Capital

bits of ware are still to be unearthed in these parts of the world. If you see a likely cup or saucer, get Geoffrey to talk French for you.' Gaston Arbuthnot was a dabbler in most branches of bric-à-brac, and up to the present date had never lost money by his dealings. 'Mrs. Thorne, when we have got rid of these young people, I want you to criticise me. My beautiful fishing-girl grows too much like a figure from the mode-books.'

Linda Thorne, promptly obedient, took up her position at the artist's side.

CHAPTER VIII.

A SWAGGER AND A SWORD.

It was the hottest, most deserted hour of the day when the walking party reached Langrune plage, an hour when such of the young Parisians as do not follow la pêche drive donkey-carts—those wonderful, springless, seatless Langrune carts—along the country roads, or start, by rail, to distant Trouville for toilettes and distraction. Here and there were elderly ladies at work before the doors of their canvas bathing-sheds. In the road two portly fathers of families were solemnly sending up ‘messengers’ to a very small Japanese kite some fifty or sixty feet above their heads. Two other middle-aged gentlemen played at battledore and shuttlecock. A few irrepressible

boulevard lovers sat over their cards or dominoes outside the restaurant windows of the principal hotel. The shrill sounds from a fish auction held on the monster slab of rough granite which constitutes the Langrune marketplace, alone broke the stillness.

Before one had thought it possible that dress or speech could have betrayed the nationality of the new-comers, up ran a brown-legged, tattered sand-imp, holding out a bunch of shore flowers. He announced his name, with some pride of birth, as Jean Jacques la Ferté of these parts, offering his services as cicerone to the English strangers.

‘The gentlemen, without doubt, make a pilgrimage to La Delivrande, half a league away up the country? At La Delivrande is the church, and the altar where the miracles are wrought. There are the little ships of the sailors, the crutches left by the cripples who get back use of their legs. And for the ladies there are the stalls with the relics. Every one in the country,’ ran on the child, with voluble

distinctness—Jean Jacques, a source of revenue to his parents, was trained to speak good French with the visitors—‘every one in the country who is sick gets cured. Every one who has a grand espoir goes to La Delivrande, and, if he has faith, attains it. Or so the curé says,’ added Jean Jacques, with a roll of his black eyes and a knowing shrug of the shoulders.

At seven years of age even sand-imps, in these advanced French days, like to show we are no longer bound by the priestly superstitions that were well enough for our grandmothers.

Lord Rex made a free paraphrase of the child’s narrative in English, and was witty thereupon. ‘Every one who is sick gets cured. Every one who has a grand espoir goes to La Delivrande, and, if he have faith, obtains it. Miss Verschoyle, what do you say? Have you, a grand espoir? Have you faith? Shall we make our pilgrimage, confess our little peccadilloes, and get cured together?’

Miss Verschoyle rebuked his flippancy, but

with lips less severe than her words. For Rosie's mood was a lenient one. Had not Lord Rex throughout the day conducted himself as well, really, as though that poor Mrs. Arbuthnot were non-existent? It was decided that every one had unfulfilled hopes, that every one stood in need of cure, and that a general confession of peccadilloes would be the best possible employment of the afternoon! In another five minutes the pilgrims were on their road, ragged Jean Jacques leading the way, towards the distant white twin spires of La Delivrande.

The plage, I have said, was deserted; not so the lane, with quaint wooden houses on either side, which forms the High Street of Langrune. Here were bare-limbed, dark-faced fisher-lads, busily mending their nets; clear-starchers plying their delicate craft in the open air; housewives roasting coffee; pedlars chaffering over their outspread goods. Huge cats, with sleepy, watchful eyes, the sun shining comfortably on their ebon-barred coats, reposed

on the window-sills. Lace-makers were at work, their head-gear antiquated as their faces, their bobbins twirling in and out the pins, unerringly, as though they were the very threads of fate itself. Everywhere was the din of voices. Everywhere were open doors, open windows ; and within, such plenitude of frugal cleanliness, such polished oak cupboards, such well-scoured cooking pans, such snow-white bed draperies, such balsams and geraniums in brilliant scarlet pots, as might have put a Dutch village to shame.

Marjorie Bartrand and Dinah paused beside one of the lace-makers' chairs, allowing the more ardent of the pilgrims to get on ahead. A distinct shade of constraint was holding Marjorie and Geff Arbuthnot aloof to-day. They had not met since yesterday's friendly parting. No further misunderstanding in respect of Geff's celibacy was possible between them. But a change had come across Marjorie's manner towards her tutor. Geoffrey was sensible that she answered him with pungent and monosyl-

labic curtness during the whole of their outward voyage. And—seeing that among the knot of pretty Sarnian girls excellent temper reigned supreme, also that Geoffrey had joined the party for other motives than his own pleasure—one can scarcely wonder that this philosopher of four-and-twenty suffered himself, without over-difficulty, to be consoled.

At the present moment, disappearing in the perspective of Langrune village, Geoffrey walked, to all outward seeming, well content, beside the prettiest and least wise of the three Miss de Carterets. Of which fact Marjorie took a brief and scornful note in her heart.

‘One can imagine a man’s becoming a senior wrangler.’ She made the remark to Dinah as they watched the everlasting bobbins whirl. ‘Yes, even I, with my halting Euclid and weak algebra (of which, no doubt, Mr. Geoffrey Arbuthnot has spoken), can imagine a man’s becoming a senior wrangler. I can no more conceive of bobbin-turning than I could of a world in which two and two shall make five.’

Dinah's slower brain needed time for reflection. 'There could not be a world where two and two make five,' she observed with certainty. 'And lace-making, once you have served your time, steadily, is easy enough. Two of my cousins, down Honiton way, are lace-makers, and I learned a little of it when I was a child. The number of threads looks hard to strangers, Miss Bartrand, but it just gets to one twirl of the bobbins in time. Many of the workers keep to the same pattern for life, when they know it well. After a bit, your fingers work without your eyes.'

'How horrible! One twirl of the bobbins, one pattern, for life! And to think that lace-makers do not commit suicide by scores!'

'I don't know that there's much difference between lace-work, or wool-work, or plain sewing,' said Dinah Arbuthnot. 'We have, all of us, to go through with our day's task, whatever the stitch may be.'

The speech came so naturally, was so fraught with unconscious womanly humility,

that Marjorie felt abashed. What real heroism, of an incomprehensible kind, must not Gaston Arbuthnot's wife possess? This girl of two-and-twenty who worked perpetual cross-stitch, who kept her tongue and spirit calm, who loved, with soul and might, yonder *débonnaire* gentleman, of the handsome eyes and decorative smile, sketching charming Parisian fisher-girls on the beach—under Linda Thorne's criticism!

‘If I speak hotly against needlework, it is that I am thinking of Spain, my mother's country. In Spain, you must know, the miserable girls, to this hour, scarcely learn more than embroidery in their schools and convents, with reading enough, perhaps, to stumble through the announcement of a bull-fight, or decipher a love-letter. Of course,’ admitted Marjorie Bartrand, coldly, ‘it is said that when a woman marries, in England or in Spain, she must do as her husband wills. I never see the force of that “must.” I think a woman should do what is right for herself, with large trust in Provi-

dence as to the rest ! The question is not one that concerns me. Still, Mrs. Arbuthnot, one cannot help feeling indignant about all very crushed people. I am dead against slavery, especially when slavery puts on a domestic garb.'

By this time they had passed the last straggling houses of Langrune. Fair level country, the fields already on the edge of harvest, spread around their road. Along the wayside path was a very mosaic of brilliantly blended hues, the corn-flowers blue and purple, the scarlet poppies, the white and gold of the wild camomile making up the purest chord of colour. A slight south-west wind, dry and elastic after its transit over so many a league of sunny land, was invigorating as wine.

'How the spirit rises the moment one treads real solid earth !' cried Marjorie Bartrand. 'I feel at this moment like walking straight off to Spain, the country I love and where my life will be spent ! Why, with twenty francs apiece in

our pockets, and camping out by night under stacks or hedges, you and I might easily reach the Peninsula on foot, Mrs. Arbuthnot.'

Dinah's geography did not embolden her to hazard a contradiction. Something in Marjorie Bartrand's tone jarred on her reasonlessly. It were hard to believe that she considered Geff a man likely to fall in love. Had not the conditions of her life for years put speculations as to Geoffrey's future happiness on one side? And still, a true daughter of Eve in every weakness belonging to the passion, Dinah was an inchoate match-maker. She would fain have seen the whole world blest with such fireside beatitude as constituted her own ideal of highest good. With firm and true perception she had noticed a dozen trivial things of late, all proving Geff's imagination if not his heart to be in his teaching of Latin and Greek at Tintajoux Manoir. She had hoped that the notice taken of herself by Marjorie was an earnest of the pupil's liking for her master, had furtively and with misgiving dug the foundations of many an

air-castle that Marjorie and Geff, at some far-off day, might jointly inhabit.

The girl's diatribes against domestic slavery, her open avowal of love for Spain and of her hopes of spending her life among Spanish people, caused a troubled look to come on Dinah's face.

'Your plans don't point towards an English home, Miss Bartrand. Yet I think Geoffrey has told me you mean to study at Girton?'

'To fit myself for my future work—yes. The Spanish school-boards are just as conservative as English ones. A young woman armed with Cambridge certificates would have more chance of coming to the front than another, equally strong-minded, who should rely on her own merits.'

'Strong-minded!' Dinah ejaculated with horror. 'At your age, with all the sweet happiness of life still to come, you talk, as though you approved such things, of being strong-minded?'

Marjorie swept off the heads from a cluster of wayside camomile flowers with the stick of

her sun-shade. An expression of will which yet was neither unlovely nor unfeminine glowed upon her girlish face.

‘Let us understand each other better, Mrs. Arbuthnot. It may well be that our notions of “sweet happiness” are not the same.’

Dinah looked uneasy, and kept silent.

‘Power—I will make a confession to you such as I never made before—power is my ideal of happiness. I want to rule, we will hope for good ; in any case, to rule, to be needed on all sides, sought after, distinguished—to see my name in print ! That is the truth, no matter how I may wrap truth up in fine-sounding words,’ said Marjorie Bartrand. ‘That is the secret of my enthusiasm for humanity, and of my personal ambition. To lead others, *to command*, is my ideal of happiness.’

‘And mine,’ exclaimed Gaston Arbuthnot’s wife, unhesitatingly, ‘is—to obey. For a woman to look up to another stronger life, to be ruled by a stronger will, gladly to take all little household worries on herself—I speak

badly, Miss Bartrand, but you guess my meaning—and feel more than paid by one kind look or word in return, to know that as much as she wants of the world is safe between four lowly walls, to have her hours filled with the care of others, to keep her parlour bright and cheerful, to hear the voices of the children——’

Dinah’s own voice broke; and Marjorie, who had watched her with looks of lofty compassion, softened involuntarily.

‘So far from speaking badly, Mrs. Arbuthnot, you speak with very pretty eloquence. You draw a picture of constant giving up, which, if one could believe it to be from life, would, I confess, be attractive. It *is* drawn from life, perhaps?’

‘Oh—no; I said, only, that would be my ideal of happiness,’ faltered Dinah, with a pang.

‘Fancied or real, such an existence would never do for me. I have not much taste for obedience. I have none at all for household worries. Babies I bar.’

‘Miss Bartrand!’

‘Yes, I do. Grandpapa and I visit about in our Pagan way among the Guernsey country people, and I know that I absolutely bar babies of every shade and degree. I am not sure I would go so far as to *injure* one,’ said Marjorie, stealing a glance at her companion’s shocked face; ‘but I feel that they are safest kept out of my sight. I tell the mothers so.’

‘You are too young to know what you feel, Miss Bartrand.’ There was a standstill of some moments ere Dinah recovered herself enough to speak. ‘Long before you are my age you’ll begin to see things differently. Young girls are a bit hard, I’ve sometimes thought, in all classes of life, until the time comes.’

‘What time, may I ask?’

‘The time for having a sweetheart and getting married,’ said Dinah Arbuthnot.

From any other lips Marjorie would have regarded such a suggestion as an indignity. Dinah was so true a woman, had a soul so whitely delicate, that the speech carried with

it no possible suspicion of offence. It was homely common sense, kindly and simply uttered.

‘What you say might be true of most girls of my age. If I am hard, it is not because of my youth, or my inexperience. I have had ’—Marjorie’s face flamed to the hue of the poppies in the corn—‘what the world is pleased to call a sweetheart. But for the interposition of Providence (I remember that interposition, night and morning, on my knees) I should be married now.’

‘Unless he loved you above everything, you are best as you are, Miss Bartrand. In marriage it is all or nothing. I mean—I mean,’ Dinah hesitated, ‘no wife could be happy with half a heart bestowed on her.’

‘Half! What do you say to a quarter, a fraction?’ exclaimed Marjorie, hotly. ‘What do you say to a creature stuffed as the dolls are, with sawdust, in lieu of a human heart at all? A creature well set up as regards shoulders, six feet in measurement, with fine

white teeth, blue eyes, yellow moustache, a swagger and a sword? His would scarcely be the larger soul, Mrs. Arbuthnot, the stronger will which it should be a woman's crown of honour to obey!'

Down went another head of clustering camomile, felled by a well-aimed stroke from Marjorie's hand. Her eyes flashed fire.

'And yet a wayward girl, scarcely past sixteen, and with no mother to give her counsel, might for two or three weeks, you know, be hurried into thinking such a man a hero. I was that girl, Mrs. Arbuthnot. Vanity blinded me, or the love of power, or something stronger than either. At all events, when Major Tredennis asked me, one fine morning, to be engaged to him, I said "Yes."'

'And the Seigneur of Tintajeux?' asked Dinah, looking round at the dimpled, indignant face of seventeen.

"Major Tredennis comes of a race of gentlemen," said grandpapa. "If Major Tredennis can make adequate settlements, and my

granddaughter elects to spend her life with a popinjay, she may do so.”’

‘And, with no better advice than that, you were engaged?’

‘I was engaged. Major Tredennis used to write me foolish notes. He gave me a ring I never wore. He gave me chocolate creams, and a setter puppy. He sang French songs to me, in an English accent. Looking back at it all now, I think the chocolate creams were the best part of that bad time, except, of course, the setter, *whom I loved*. When it was all broken off—for the owner of the white teeth and the sword was a right wicked craven, and should have married a girl in England who cared for him, without once looking at me;—when it was all broken off, and I had to send Jock back, I did weep, scalding tears, at parting from him. The only tears I have ever shed, or shall shed, in connection with love-matters.’

‘Wait!’ was Dinah Arbuthnot’s answer. ‘If I see you, as I hope to do, two or three years hence, it may be you will tell a different story.’

Marjorie glanced at the yachting party, sauntering contentedly, a hundred yards or so in front, among the lights and shadows of the orchard-bordered road. There was Lord Rex, outrageously devoted in manner to Rosie Verschoyle, with whom he loitered apart. And there, a little divided, also, from the rest, was Geff Arbutnot, well entertained, one must surmise, by the shallow talk, fascinated by the pink-and-white charms of Ada, the most soulless and the prettiest of the de Carteret family.

‘If such a revolution takes place, a dozen years hence, that I marry,’ she observed, after consideration, ‘the husband I choose shall be a head-and-shoulders taller than myself, morally. No singer of ballad sentiment, no popinjay, with yellow moustache, and a sword, and uniform, next time. If I take to myself a master, he shall be a man—with a temper, a will, a purpose in life, all nobler than my own.’

Such a husband as Geoffrey would be! The thought obeyed the wish in Dinah’s heart.

‘And I must be first—first in his affection.

I would have no rivals, past or present. If Bayard, himself, walked the earth and wished to marry me, Marjorie Bartrand, I would ask him if I was first. Yes, Mrs. Arbuthnot, I would ask Chevalier Bayard, himself, if he had looked at any other woman before he loved me; and if he had, and though my heart broke for it, I would refuse him.'

A red light broke on Marjorie's cheeks, her eyes dilated. The likeness to old Andros, which came out in every moment of strong emotion, was never more marked than now.

'If we ask too much we may lose all,' said Dinah, not perhaps without a pang of dread as visions of Geoffrey's youth rose before her. 'I never heard anything about this gentleman.'

'Chevalier Bayard? the first gentleman the world has known!'

'But if he was put upon his word, yes, and though he stood with his bride before the altar, I think Chevalier Bayard might have to confess to some foolish fancy in the past.'

‘I spoke of love, not of foolishness,’ exclaimed Marjorie Bartrand. Then, as though quickly repenting of her warmth: ‘We have talked more than enough,’ she cried, ‘about a peradventure that will never become fact. Let us forget, with all speed, that so much nonsense has been spoken.’

But the conversation was one which neither of these young women could, by any means, forget while she lived.

CHAPTER IX.

REX BASIRE'S HUMOUR.

A ROUGH paved village square ; green-shuttered houses, sweltering in the afternoon sun ; a pair of openwork spires, delicate as lace, dazzlingly white as Caen stone could make them, silhouetted against the burning sky ; tattered children, with mercenary hands full of wild flowers ; a knot of British pilgrims, irreverently loquacious outside the church's western door ; gruesome beggars making exhibition of wounds ; honest peasant people ; dishonest relic sellers—such were the salient features of La Delivrande at the moment when Marjorie and Dinah descended into its closer air out of the field-smelling, wind-blown road that brought them hither from the coast.

‘We will ask Mrs. Arbuthnot’s opinion, and abide by it,’ cried Lord Rex, coming forward a few paces to meet them. ‘She will be far better versed in this kind of thing than the rest of us. Ought we to carry candles in our hands, Mrs. Arbuthnot, when we seek our cure? There is a candle-stall conveniently opposite, and Miss Verschoyle and I will head the procession as penitents-in-chief.’

‘Please help to keep Lord Rex in order, Mrs. Arbuthnot. He is really doing and saying the absurdest things!’ Rosie Verschoyle must have been, surely, at the zenith of good temper when she thus addressed that poor Mrs. Arbuthnot! ‘Now, Lord Rex, I command you to drop this talk about candles instantly. Of course the whole business is a ridiculous piece of Popish superstition, still,’ observed Rosie, with a certain largeness, ‘one has one’s ideas. A church is a church. Positively, I will not speak another word to you to-day unless you behave yourself with decorum when we are inside.’

The awfulness of the threat appeared, for the moment, to check Lord Rex Basire's playful spirits. He made no purchase of candles. Save that he affected a sudden and very marked lameness of gait, he behaved no worse than his companions on entering the church. Guided by ragged Jean Jacques the English people walked up to a fretted stone screen dividing the choir from the nave. In a small side altar on the left was a doll, clothed in woven gold, unlovely of face, with eyes 'dreadfully staring,' with a crown of paper lilies, with a score of rushlights burning before her in a row—*La Delivrande*.

Who that has travelled in primitive French districts can fail of knowing these little miracle chapels, their atmosphere, their votive offerings, their sincerity, their tinsel, their pathos? At least a hundred graven memorials on the wall beside the Virgin told the story of simple human hearts that had suffered, believed, of anguished human hopes that had here found fulfilment. Dinah Arbuthnot's cheeks paled as

Marjorie, in a whisper, translated the meaning of the inscriptions. Here a mother recorded her gratitude for her child, a wife for her husband, a daughter for her parent. Here the names were graven in full, here in initials. Occasionally there was one word only, '*Reconnaissance*,' and a date. Dinah's cheeks paled, her eyes filled. If she were alone, Dinah felt—puritan, heretic, though she were—she would gladly kneel and make her confession, lay bare her sorrow on the spot where so many stricken and weary human souls had cast away the sad garment of repression before her!

Lord Rex Basire's view of the place and situation continued irresistibly comic. And the faces of his companions, the rose-pink face of Miss Verschoyle not excepted, failed to condemn him for his levity.

A heap of pious gifts, testimonials, in kind, from the cured, lay, incongruously, as they had been offered, before the altar of the Virgin. There were crutches, big and small, a child's reclining carriage, models of ships innumerable,

a wooden leg—the stoutest faith might long for an explanation of that wooden leg! Well, reader, with the fair church solemn and hushed, five or six black-clad women telling their beads before the different altars, its only Catholic inmates, Lord Rex, it must be concluded, found the temptation towards practical jocularities too strong for him. Hobbling up to the altar, this humorous little lord stood, with bowed head, with contrite manner, in front of the lily-crowned figure for some minutes' space. Slowly ascending a step, he next deposited his crutch, a silver and ebony toy, upon the heap of worn and dusty peasant offerings; then walked away with tripping, resonant step, with head joyfully erect, down the western aisle, as who should say, 'Behold me—a believer, cured.'

Ragged Jean Jacques held his mouth between two sun-blackened hands, showily pantomiming his appreciation of the Englishman's costly waggishness. The subalterns of the Maltshire Royals tittered aloud. Alas! in a

marching regiment, as elsewhere, has not human nature its weaker side? Is not a duke's son, with two inches of brain, and wit in proportion, a duke's son, even when he jests? The young ladies with one exception looked about as frigid as Italian snow looks under the kisses of an April sun. The exception was Marjorie Bartrand.

Away out of the church flew Marjorie, brushing against Rex Basire's elbow in her exit. She waited in the porch outside, eager beggars pressing forward with their wounds, children with their half-dead wild-flowers, relic-mongers with their chaplets and rosaries—blest, ay, to the last bead, blest, 'tout bonnement,' by his Holiness, away in Rome. By-and-by, when the last of the loud-talking merry-spirited knot of idlers had issued forth from the church, Marjorie fastened upon the offender-in-chief. With luminous eyes, with drawn breath, with hands tightly clenched in her hot indignation, she scathed him thus :

‘ You have played a delicate bit of comedy,

have you not, Lord Rex? It was the finest stroke of humour to scandalise a few poor peasant women, saying prayers for their dead? . . . For me,' looking one by one round the group, 'I felt ashamed—more ashamed than ever I was in my life before—of belonging to the same nation as you all! I read once,' said Marjorie, 'in a wise book: "Where we are ignorant, let us show reverence." The ignorance, only, has been shown to-day.'

Dinah Arbuthnot and Geoffrey, who had lingered behind the others in the church, arrived on the scene just in time to hear the last accents of this denunciation. Then, ere the culprits could utter a word in self-defence, away shot Marjorie's arrowy figure along a shadowed by-street, away, neither stopping nor hesitating, along the old chaussée that leads from La Delivrande Paris-wards, in an exactly opposite direction to the Langrune road.

'By Jupiter! I was never so frightened in my life.' Rex Basire's limbs collapsed under him in well dramatised alarm. 'Have all

Girton girls got dynamite in their eyes? Does their speech invariably bristle with torpedoes? Is Marjorie Bartrand Protestant, or Catholic, or what?’

‘Ah, *what!*’ repeated Rosie Verschoyle, ever ready with a little amiable platitude. ‘A hundred years ago the Bartrands were Papists, remember. It is a moot question among the people who know them best what the Tintajeux religion is at the present day.’

‘I know one thing,’ cried Geoffrey’s friend, Ada de Carteret. ‘All through Tintajeux parish the Seigneur is looked upon as more learned than canny. When the country folk come near old Andros after dark, declaiming Greek, and with a couple of black dogs at his heels, they will run a mile round sooner than meet him.’

‘The Seigneur’s term of endearment for Marjorie is witch, when they happen to be on speaking terms at all,’ said another voice. ‘Poor girl! In spite of her temper one cannot help liking her extremely. Who was it said

of Marjorie that she had such an olive-like flavour?’

‘You always feel there must be a fund of goodness in the dear child—somewhere.’ This finishing note was given in Miss Verschoyle’s thin voice. ‘As to the lecture you came in for, Lord Rex, you deserved it richly. It is quite too—in saying this, I mean it—quite ! to laugh at other people’s beliefs, even when they are most ridiculous.’

And then they all sauntered off to the stalls, where Lord Rex, we may be sure, found ample scope for his veiled yet poignant irony among the crosses, medals, rosaries, and relics that had been blest, ‘tout bonnement,’ away in Rome, by his Holiness !

Marjorie, meanwhile, pursued her way through shadow and sunshine, unconscious in which direction the fiery haste of her steps was bearing her. When her temper had burnt out—in the space, say, of two minutes and a half—she perceived that she was once more in open country, alone among colza stacks and fields of

ripening barley, but on a less frequented road, amidst a landscape with wider horizons than the road and landscape she and Dinah had traversed in coming to Langrune from the sea.

How good it was to breathe this wild, well-oxygenised air! With what glad senses Marjorie gazed about her across the plains, rippling, as the sun lowered, in lucent amber waves, and shaded deliciously at intervals by rows of pearly, smoke-coloured poplar! A family of peasant farmers drove by in one of their old-world Norman harvest waggons—coeval, perhaps, with Andros Bartrand's sickle! Friendly nods, gleaming smiles from sunburnt faces; were bestowed on the little girl as the homely cartload jolted on. She watched with wistful eyes until the waggon lessened, was lost to sight in the long perspective of white road. Seating herself beside a ditch under shadow of a solitary pollard willow, a sudden vision of vines and olives and Spanish sierras arose, with all the strength of inherited nostalgia, in Marjorie's breast. If the harvesters would only

have carried her a league or two onward with them! She had nothing of value in her possession but a watch. How many francs could one raise upon a watch, Marjorie Bartrand wondered, in some primitive, unsuspecting Norman town? Enough, surely, living among peasant people, and eking means out by an occasional day's work at onion-weeding or colza stacking, to carry one down to the frontier, the cherished land of dreams. A letter could be sent to relieve the Seigneur's mind, and . . .

And then, glancing back along the chaussée Marjorie saw a man's figure advancing towards her with steady quickness; a figure she knew over-well, darkly outlined against the chrome yellow of the sky. So Ada de Carteret was forsaken. Her heart went pit-a-pat. She would have given a fortune to fly, yet stirred not! One minute later and her nostalgia was cured. Longings for vine and olive and Spanish sierra had vanished, all, before the unromantic English presence of Geoffrey Arbuthnot.

CHAPTER X.

YOU—AND I!

‘You have found out a right pleasant spot.’ Geff settled himself coolly into repose among the long wayside grasses that clothed the opposite or field side of the ditch. ‘Our friends, when they have bought themselves each a cross and medal, are going down to watch the Parisians return from fishing. You and I will have the best of it among the barley here.’

• ‘You—and I!’

‘You—and I! Does the expression displease you, Miss Bartrand?’

‘If you have any intention of remaining, you had better take out your pipe at once, Mr. Arbuthnot.’

‘Why?’

‘Because an idle man, his feet dangling over a ditch, and not smoking, would be a spectacle too wretched to contemplate.’

‘The description may be worse than the fact. I am idle. My feet dangle over a ditch. I am not smoking. I was never less wretched in my life.’

‘I spoke of such a person as an object of painful contemplation.’

‘Is the spectacle painful to you at this moment? Speak frankly.’

‘I—I only wished to let you know that you might smoke, if you chose.’

‘Thanks. I would rather do nothing to alter my present state of feeling.’

And then they came to a full stop: a rather marked one.

Marjorie spoke first. ‘The charm of a spot like this’—she brought out each word with incision—‘is its solitude.’

‘*Solitude à deux*. The French have such an expression, have they not?’

Geff Arbuthnot asked the question, pronouncing his *eu* vilely.

‘“Solitude a-doo!” I am hopelessly stupid,’ said Marjorie, holding her head aloft. ‘“A-doo!” Is it meant for a farewell, or what? I really do not see the drift of the idiom—a quotation, perhaps, from one of the classic authors?’

Geoffrey was sensible that she had never been more dangerous than at this juncture, mutinous pride struggling with merriment on her clear girlish face, as she turned his terrible French accent into ridicule. He was sensible, also, of a new, an unexpected pleasure in being laughed at by her.

‘Were you enjoying your solitude (without the “doo”) truly, and thoroughly, when I disturbed you?’

‘Thoroughly, no. I had not got the flavour of folly enough out of my mouth for that. You relished, I hope, the exquisite wit we English people showed in the church, Mr. Arbuthnot? You appreciated the fun of

wounding simple people's beliefs by depositing our Oxford-street finery among the real piteous crutches before La Delivrande? And to think that young women,' exclaimed Marjorie, waxing warm, 'are stigmatised, in masses, as frivolous! How can they be anything *but* frivolous, with such examples before them?'

'Let us cast up both columns of the account. Would a man—no, as we are talking of Lord Rex Basire, let us say would a foolish youth—display his foolishness among a bevy of pretty girls, unless they were ready to give him smiles as an encouragement?'

'I am sure Mrs. Arbuthnot would not be among the smilers. Her beautiful face looked so good and calm, when the rest of us stood giggling there before the altar.'

'My cousin is serious, a little over-serious always.' Geoffrey Arbuthnot gazed attentively at the horizon as he made this remark.

'It would do your cousin a vast deal of good to run away from that feather-weight husband of hers. Look shocked, if you choose ;

I am in earnest. I consider,' said Marjorie, displaying her worldly wisdom with gravity, 'that Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot's character is thoroughly spoilt. He is a charming fellow, doubtless. Still, everybody need not remind him of his charm to his face.'

'And you believe in retributive morality? You think the curative treatment for a charming fellow is—that his wife should run away from him?'

'My experience of charming fellows would incline me towards heroic treatment. As we walked up from Langrune I asked Mrs. Arbuthnot to start with me on foot for Spain. With twenty francs in our pocket, I told her, and doing a day's work on the road whenever our resources ran low, we might get down safe to the frontier in time. But Mrs. Arbuthnot did not seem to see it.'

'Dinah's is not an adventurous spirit. If you would accept a substitute, Miss Bartrand, perhaps I——'

'Go on, pray.'

‘ Might be allowed to follow, with a thick stick, at a distance.’

‘ Keep your stick for England! I would not be afraid on the loneliest road between this and Barcelona.’

‘ Without the stick, then—shall we start?’

Marjorie shifted her posture a little. She became suddenly interested in a plant of marsh-mallow at her side.

‘ When next I enter Spain, Mr. Arbuthnot, it shall be with dignity. When I meet my mother’s people I hope to be armed with degrees, certificates—whatever the English universities will confer on me.’

‘ Don’t go until your name has been bracketed high on the list of wranglers.’

As Geoffrey made this venture on thin ice he watched his pupil narrowly. One of the storm-flashes that lit Marjorie Bartrand’s face into such frequent, such perilous beauty, was his reward.

‘ You mean—never go at all! Do you feel a pleasure, Mr. Arbuthnot, in throwing cold

water over my dearest hopes and ambitions?’

‘An enormous pleasure, Miss Bartrand. I have felt it from that first evening when you were good enough to hire me as your teacher at Tintajoux.’

The girl looked away from him, her colour changing.

‘That evening, when I had to receive you in state, to make formal speeches and curtsies, all my great-aunts and uncles looking on through their Bartrand eyelids! Do you remember our Bon Espoir? He was an omen of better temper, perhaps, than has prevailed between us since. Were you taken aback? Was I quite unlike what you expected?’

She asked these momentous questions with the keen curiosity characteristic of the passion in its earlier days. But all the time she shrank from encountering Geff Arbuthnot’s glance.

‘You really desire to know?’

‘Yes.’

‘I will tell you, on one condition. What was your wish when you curtsied under the cedars to the new moon?’

‘My wish?’ turning farther and farther away from him. ‘Why, folly unrepeatable—the sort of nonsense my nurses taught me to say when I was little. Your memory is inconveniently good.’

‘Accurate to the smallest detail! How clearly one can see the meeting of those four water-lanes, and the flowers you gave me, as I know, now, alas! for Mrs. Arbuthnot, and the ribbon you tied them with—the ribbon,’ said Geff coolly, ‘which you will some day send me back for a book-marker! Yes, the fairest summer evening of my life was the one when I first saw *Tintajeux Manoir*—and you.’

And he believed his own words. Sure sign that the heart within him was sound—healthiest life at its core. Guessing at the confessions of that ingenuous maidenly face as Marjorie, half blushes, half wilfulness, persistently gave him her profile, Geoffrey Arbuthnot had clean for-

gotten Lesser Cheriton, ay, and a drama played out there in which he took a not unimportant part.

‘I think this Norman evening is to the full as fair,’ said Marjorie. ‘There are bigger sweeps of outline, there is more quality in the air than falls to our lot in the Channel Islands.’

Then, again, there came a pause, broken softly by the occasional hum of an insect on the wing, by the swaying of stalks, the whispers of the ripe and restless grain, by the chirp of the hedge crickets, by the solitary treble of a lark lost somewhere, pouring its heart out in the sea-blue vault above.

Marjorie could not be silent long.

‘To begin at the beginning, what did you think of me when you got my first note—the two lines I sent in answer to yours? Nothing very good, or you would not be so reluctant to tell it.’

‘I thought,’ said Geff, ‘that you required my services as a coach, that there was a little

affectation about your Greek "e's," and that you name was Marjorie D. Bartrand.'

'That terrible signature of mine—the one bearable name I possess reduced to a D! You know, Mr. Arbuthnot, I hope, what D. stands for?'

'Dorcas?' suggested Geoffrey, 'or perhaps Deborah? We have a number of fine old Hebrew names beginning with D.'

'But I am not a fine old Hebrew. I am a Spanish woman, heart and soul, and I bear my mother's name, Dolores. Grandpapa and I met an American in Paris, when I was younger, who used to call me "Miss Dollars." The thought of that pronunciation always makes me shy of bringing my beautiful Spanish name to the fore.'

'Dollars is more beautiful than Dolores.' Saying this, Geoffrey took studious care to imitate her accent. 'Dollars is at least suggestive of human activity, of the market-place, not the graveyard. Why should a child, with all the good chances of life open, have such a

name as Grief imposed upon her by worldly-wise godfathers and godmothers?’

‘I speak of Dolores, not Grief, and—and you have no poetry in you, Mr. Geoffrey Arbuthnot! You don’t know all that a word says to us southern people. Think of plain Marjorie Bartrand—nothing but “a r, a r!” If I could only change Bartrand for a name with no “a r” in it, I——’

The supposition was rushing forth with velocity. Then, in a trice, Marjorie stopped. She coloured to the roots of her hair. And then she and Geoffrey laughed so loud that the stilly air rang with their laughter. If these two young people did not actually tread the primrose path, they were within a stone’s-throw of it, ignorant though both might be of the route which lay so near them.

‘That “a r” is the worst of all your cruelties,’ said Geff, presently. ‘To show my greatness of mind I will return evil for good. I will tell you what you wish to know. As I walked out for the first time to Tintajoux, I

had you constantly before my mind's eye, Miss Bartrand. I saw you, with the vision of the spirit, every inch an heiress.'

'Every inch an heiress!' repeated Marjorie, abashed.

'With rigid manners, hair drawn back, Chinese fashion, and overwhelming dignity. Whenever people are of more than common volume—I fancy that is the euphemistic term, is it not?—dignity!'

'And you found me—a scarecrow.' She measured, mentally, and with self-abasement, the leanness of her unfledged figure. 'What did you think when a lank country child, in a cotton gown, and without either dignity or manner, appeared before you?'

'I felt it was my duty to accept facts as they came. I summoned up courage, and mastered my disappointment with tolerable ease,' said Geoffrey Arbuthnot.

His face supplied a postscript to the admission which caused Marjorie's heart to beat faster.

'We must not stop here all day!' she cried,

even in their quietest expression touched with fire. He admired the character, so superior to all mere prettiness, of her serious large mouth.

‘The wish has come true,’ he whispered, in a tone never to be forgotten by Marjorie Bertrand, ‘although I have the misfortune of being myself, not Gaston. Let me help you.’

He held out his hands, but Marjorie, with her agile young strength, had cleared the ditch almost before his assistance was proffered. They paused a moment or two irresolute, they discussed a little as to latitude and longitude, and then away the two started, in the direction of Courseulles, across the corn-fields.

A third figure, dove-winged, golden-quivered, walked with them, although they might not discern his presence.

CHAPTER XI.

CUT AND THRUST.

NEVER was a man surer of tumbling into little unlooked-for sociabilities than Gaston Arbuthnot. Had he been shipwrecked on a South Sea island I believe Gaston would have chanced upon an acquaintance there, some vanished shade from London club or Paris café would have seized him by the button-hole before the day was out !

He was button-holed in Langrune-sur-Mer. When the pilgrimage returned from La Delivrande, Linda and her Robbie were found seated with Mrs. Verschoyle on a trio of hired chairs before the hotel, taking their pleasure rather mournfully. Cassandra Tighe, her scarlet cloak conspicuous from afar, was dredging,

—happy Cassandra—among such rocks as the tide still left uncovered.

Gaston Arbuthnot was invisible.

‘A real case of forcible abduction,’ cried Linda Thorne, addressing herself to Dinah. ‘You are not a foolishly nervous wife, I am sure, Mrs. Arbuthnot? You could philosophically listen to a story of how two pretty French girls carried away an English artist against his will?’

Dinah assented with one of her rare smiles. The knowledge that Gaston was finding amusement otherwise than in the half-clever talk, the too ready, too flattering sympathy of Linda herself, cast retrospective brightness upon the afternoon that his absence had clouded.

From jealousy of a selfish or little kind Dinah’s heart had never bled. Earlier in their married life, when Gaston still affected dancing, and as a matter of course went to balls without his wife, it was her usual next morning’s pleasure to scan his programmes, enjoy his sketches of his partners, his repetitions of their small-talk—all

without a shade of hurt feeling. Once or twice she hinted that she would fain accompany him as a looker-on. 'Nobody looks on long in this wicked world,' was Gaston's answer. 'You do not dance, you do not play whist. You have a brain under your yellow locks, and you are too young to talk scandal. Ball-room atmosphere is unwholesome. I would not hear of such a sacrifice.' And as it was not Dinah's habit to pose as martyr, she obeyed, trusting in him always.

Beautiful, pure of soul, herself, she simply honoured the beauty, believed in the purity of soul of other women. Gaston was popular, spoilt; an artist with an artist's—more than this, with an American's temperament. A degree of youthful immaturity seemed ever to lurk amidst his astute knowledge of life and of men. He had but a half-share, as he would tell her, of the fibres derived from long lines of bored ancestors. He sought diversion for diversion's sake. She had made no quarrel with the inexorable facts of her husband's existence or of her

own. If only she had been his equal, intellectually! If she could have supplied him with the mental companionship he needed, or interested him in his childless fireside! Ah, could she thus have risen to his level, Gaston's heart had been in her keeping still. Hence came the morbid unrest of her present life; hence the dread, increasing daily, hourly, strive with it as she might, of Linda's influence.

'I am afraid one gets used to most things, Mrs. Thorne. I have seen Gaston run away with so often, that I am not much moved by the thought of these pretty French girls.'

Linda Thorne rose. She rested her hand confidentially within Dinah's arm, much to Dinah's chagrin, and proposed that they should walk together along the sands to look for Mr. Arbuthnot.

'Yes, I must positively tell you the whole story. Your husband had finished his sketch of the lovely fisher-girl. The young person was not at all lovely, in fact. But she was striking.

She had distinct genre. Artists care for genre, you know, much more than for beauty.'

Dinah resolved to question Gaston as to the truth of this. She resolved to cultivate distinct genre in herself for the remainder of her days.

'Striking—that word sums up all. The big cobalt-blue eyes, that say about as much, in reality, as a china tea-saucer, and are supposed by imaginative men to say everything—blonde hair worn in a pigtail, palpably not original, to her heels; complexion carefully toned to a shade one point short of freckles; bare arms, akimbo,—excellently shaped arms, of course; a native prawn basket, and a fishing-dress from Worth's. I got to know the type so well,' said Linda, 'in my governess days, during one summer, especially, when the Benjamin sent me to Houlgate with her children.'

Dinah, who, as we have seen, had no genius for supplying the hooks and eyes of conversation, remained chillingly silent.

'Your husband had finished his sketch of

her—an admirably idealised one. I have it here.’ And Dinah, for the first time, perceived that Mrs. Thorne held possession of Gaston’s sketch-book. ‘Let us look at it together!’ impulsively, ‘or are you—no doubt you are—blasée about sketches? Well, well, it may be natural. Married to an artist, if one has no real, strong, natural talent for art——’

‘I have no real, strong, natural talent for anything,’ interrupted poor Dinah, petulantly.

‘Oh—naughty! You must not say such things. I will not allow you to be modest. Mr. Arbuthnot tells me your needlework is’—Linda looked about her as though an encomium were hard to find—‘most elaborate! In these days needlework ranks among the fine arts. Of course you are wild about this exquisite new stitch from Vienna?’

‘I have not seen it. The only wool-work I do is old-fashioned cross-stitch.’

‘Just fancy! And Mr. Arbuthnot, I am convinced, spends his time—half his time—in designing quite lovely patterns for you?’

Dinah's breast swelled as a vision of the Roscoff wild roses overcame her. She made no attempt at a parry.

'If I had married an artist I would never have gone to the shops for patterns. Or rather, if I had married an artist, I would never have embroidered at all. I should have thrown myself into his ambitions, his work—have spent my life so utterly at his side.'

Dinah stooped to pick up a little pink shell from the strand, by this action freeing herself from Linda Thorne. She put the shell inside her glove, thinking she would keep it as a memento of Langrune and of this summer day that had passed so nearly without a cloud. So nearly—but the summer day was not over yet!

'All this time I am not accounting to you for your husband's disappearance, am I? My dear creature, it was really the drollest thing! Robbie had not as yet floated up with the tide, and Mrs. Verschoyle and I, your husband with us, had made our slippery way across the rocks to

mainland. Well, just as Gast . . ., I mean, as Mr. Arbuthnot was putting a last touch to his sketch, up ran a little Frenchman, full dress, a rose and white daughter in each hand, and an enormously stout wife, with a bouquet, following. He threw his arms round your husband's neck, and but for Mr. Arbuthnot's presence of mind would certainly have kissed him.'

'Kissed!'

'Of course. Have you never lived among French people? It was some old artist companion of Gast . . ., of your husband's bachelor life. You can imagine the recollections of former joyous days spent in Paris as students together, the inquiries for mutual friends, now dead or married, the history each had to give of his marriage and present happiness!'

'I cannot. I am not imaginative.'

It must be confessed that a tinge of displeasure was audible in Dinah's voice. Every syllable of Mrs. Thorne's unpremeditated chatter had wounded her like a stiletto prick.

'Ah—and I am imaginative to my finger

tips. We seem the very antithesis of each other, in character, as we are in looks.' Linda had really a very graceful way of admitting her own plainness, when occasion offered. 'I can assure you I filled up a dozen little blanks in our Benedicts' exchange of confidences. I traced out a full and rounded whole most satisfactorily. People may slur over half a dozen years in as many words. If nature has endowed you with imagination, you read between the lines. The barest outline suggests the finished picture.'

Something in her tone would seem to imply that Gaston Arbuthnot's married life had been a spoiled life, or so it seemed to Dinah's irritated heart. Dinah felt that the half dozen words must have yielded latent hints of her own intellectual shortcomings, hints which Linda Thorne's talent for filling up blanks had developed into certainty.

'The next part of the ceremony was the introduction to Madame de Camors and the children—two small Parisian coquettes, about

the age of my Rahnee, who fell in love with Mr. Arbuthnot on the spot.'

'Little children fall in love with Gaston, always,' said Dinah, hastily.

'The family party was taking its departure, it seemed, under the broiling sun, to a children's ball at Luc Casino. At a word from papa the small imps seized a hand each of Gas . . ., of Mr. Arbuthnot, and dragged him away *nolens volens*. All children are tyrants,' generalised Linda, with a dismal yawn, occasioned probably by the recollection of her virtuously spent afternoon, 'but these terrible French children are the worst of all. Perhaps it is in imitation of the Americans. I consider the way American infants are brought forward in public places is a disgrace to the century.'

'You think children without exception should be kept in their nurseries?'

Dinah called to mind a group of four that passed her window on their road to the rose-show. She remembered a small figure dancing with exultation on rainbow-hued flounces.

‘My dear soul! Fancy putting such a question to me, a mother! Of course I make an exception of my own daughter. She is a good quiet little monkey,’ added Linda; ‘although Mr. Arbuthnot is positively spoiling her, fast—I hope I impose her on no one. Children, as a rule, I look upon from the governess point of view. You know how my bread was earned when I was young?’

‘Mr. Arbuthnot has told me that he first met you in Paris.’

‘Yes, in the domestic service of Madame Moïse Benjamin. I got twenty pounds a year and my washing. I had to sleep under the roof, to play dance music, to remodel Madame’s dresses, to teach English to the three girl Benjamins, and a boy—ah, that boy!’ said Linda, between her teeth. ‘If you think me like Becky Sharpe . . . confess now, you *do* think me like Becky Sharpe?’

‘I do not, indeed.’ Dinah’s manner grew colder and colder. ‘I never heard of Becky Sharpe before.’

‘Well, if you had,’ said Linda, in high good humour, and storing up all the little scene against future dramatisation,—‘if you had heard of Becky Sharpe, and had thought me like her, where would be the wonder? I was brought up just as Becky was, to live by my wits. My mamma — I connect her hazily with sofa cushions, much white embroidery, an Italian greyhound, doctors, and the smell of ether—my mamma died when I was four years old. She lies in Brussels cemetery,’ ran on Linda, drawing a hasty outline of a tombstone on the sand, ‘with Lady Constantia Smythe, and more than one side allusion to the peerage graven above her head. At the time she died we had not very definite daily bread. Still, my grandfather was an earl, and poor papa found one of his few consolations in making much of our nobility.’

Frankness, it would seem, was Linda Thorne’s strong point, but Dinah was unmoved by it. The earldom dazzled Gaston Arbuthnot’s lowly-born wife no more than Linda’s

personal confidences propitiated her. Dinah had a child's instinct for friends and for enemies. She liked, she disliked, unerringly, and was too transparently honest to mask her feelings.

Stooping down, she picked up another shell from the sea's smooth edge. She sought once more to widen the space between herself and her companion. Linda Thorne's quick brain observed the movement, divined the intention.

‘Excellent, stupid, well-meaning, ill-acting young woman. And I have not a reprehensible sentiment at all towards her!’ Thoughts like this shot through Linda's mind, Linda who really had it not in her to know sterner passion than a drawing-room malignity. ‘With her youth, her goodness, her complexion, her upper lip, to be jealous of poor, plain, cynical, elderly me! She needs a pretty sharp lesson. Children who cry for the moon deserve to get something worth crying for.’ Then, sweetly, ‘You seem interested in shells, dear Mrs. Arbuthnot,’ she observed aloud. ‘You study conchology as a science, perhaps, under the Platonic auspices of

that severe-looking cousin of yours, Geoffrey Arbuthnot of John's.'

'I study nothing, unfortunately for myself. I am quite ignorant,' said Dinah, lifting her face and meeting her tormentor's eyes full. 'I am picking up a shell or two,' she added, 'to keep as a remembrance of my day in Langrune.'

'I should say you would remember Langrune without any tangible memento,' remarked Linda. 'Rather ungrateful, you know, if you did not.'

'How, ungrateful?'

'Well, because the picnic was given unconditionally in honour of you——'

'I do not understand you,' interrupted Dinah, with ill-judged warmth. 'The party was planned before any one in Guernsey knew of my existence. I was asked accidentally—because I could be of use. Four or five girls had promised these young officers to come, and they wanted a married woman as a chaperon. This was what Lord Rex Basire said when he invited me on Monday.'

'And you believed him? You accepted

out of pure kindness to faire tapisserie! Mrs. Arbuthnot, you are too amiable.'

By this time Dinah Arbuthnot's face blazed from brow to chin. Her conscience, over-sensitive in the lightest matter, smote her sore. Was not a selfish longing for widened experience—nay, was not a certain distrust of Gaston, a contemptible sense of triumph over Linda—at the bottom of her acquiescence?

'What unusually correct taste Dame Nature displays in her colouring this evening.' Mrs. Thorne gazed with decent vacuity at the sky, and away from Dinah's face. 'Soft primrose, fading into pearly green, with just those few vivid touches of deep crimson. It suggests thoughts for a ball dress. And still, beautiful though the effect is, I would rather not see that sort of shimmer on the water. If we come in for fog-banks somewhere about the Race of Alderney, it will matter little whether the picnic originated for the chaperons, or the chaperons for the picnic! How atrociously hungry this sort of thing makes one! Surely, dinner-time must be drawing nigh.'

CHAPTER XII.

GROWING OLD GRACEFULLY.

‘In two words, you have amused yourself, my dear.’ Under cover of the friendly twilight, Gaston Arbuthnot pressed his wife’s hand as it rested, a little shyly, on his arm. ‘A good sign for the future. You must enter into the world more, Dinah. You must cultivate this faculty for being amused; I desire nothing better.’

Though fog-banks and disaster might lie in ambush about the Race of Alderney, nothing could be tranquilier than the fair summer evening here, on the coast of France.

After an excellent dinner, vraie cuisine Normande, served in the quaint, red-tiled salle of the Hôtel Chateaubriand, the collected

yachting party were now progressing along the pleasant sweep of road that leads to Luc. Luc alone, among this group of villages, has a jetty, and off Luc the *Princess* lay moored. Daylight's last flicker was dying from the sky. Already deep fissures of shade intersected the white sand dunes bordering the shore. The sea lay motionless, a vague iridescence far away, northward, the only foreboding of coming change. Cassandra Tighe, a bold spot of colour in the gloaming, had exchanged her dredging net for some amphibious structure of green gauze and whalebone. She flitted hither and thither among the bushes that skirted the path, moth-hunting. The younger members of the expedition, in groups of two, loitered slowly along their way, for it was an hour when girlish faces look their fairest, when men's voices are apt to soften, involuntarily!

Dinah Arbuthnot, after a good deal of strategy, had contrived not merely to get possession of her husband, but to hold him, strongly guarded, and at safe distance from the

rest. Linda Thorne, herself (and Linda had, at will, a longer or a shorter sight than other people), could scarce do more than guess at the outlines of the two figures. The little lover-like fact that this sober couple, this Darby and Joan of four years' standing, walked arm in arm, could be known only to themselves.

'Yes, Gaston, I was amused at sea, for you were there. And I was amused differently by Miss Bartrand. I wish you had been with us at La Delivrande. It was the first time I ever went inside a Popish church,' said Dinah, gravely. 'And yet, Popish though it was, I could scarce help saying my prayers as we gathered before the altar. The tears came in my eyes as I remembered—I mean as I looked at the heap of offerings, and thought of the sad hearts that had brought their troubles there.'

'Was the smell very detestable, a smell one could sketch? Had you beggars? Had the beggars wounds? Of course, votive churches and such things have to be done, in one's youth. I am too old,' said Mr. Arbuthnot;

‘my digestion is too touchy for me to run the risk of physical horrors of my own free will.’

‘I thought an artist should seek out every kind of experience.’

Gaston had so often insisted upon the duty of pursuing inspiration among all sorts and conditions of men—still more of women—that the remark from Dinah’s lips had a savour of mischief.

‘Every sort of agreeable experience, my dear child. The disgusting is for the great masters. Mine is pocket art, a branch that the critics discreetly label as decadent, although lucrative. Besides,’ said Gaston, ‘I have sold my soul to the dealers. And the dealers have sold theirs, if they have any, to a puerility-loving public. An honest manufacturer of paper weights and clock stands needs nothing but prettiness—I won’t say beauty—the prettiness of a Parisian, masquerading as a fisher-girl!’

‘Or of Parisian children dancing at an afternoon ball. Mrs. Thorne told me about your

meeting with some old student acquaintance, and how his daughters led you away captive.'

'Small tyrants! I had to dance four dances with each of them, and then be told I was "*un Monsieur très paresseux*" for my reward. And so Mrs. Thorne and you are becoming better friends,' observed Gaston Arbuthnot, looking hard through the veil of twilight at his wife's reluctant face. 'She is a dear good soul, is she not? So bright, so spontaneous! Really, I think that is Mrs. Thorne's crowning charm—her spontaneity.'

'I am no friend of hers.' Dinah's voice had become cold. 'I did not like Mrs. Thorne at first. I dislike her now.'

'Impossible, Dinah—impossible. A woman with your face should dislike no created thing.'

'I dislike her because her words sting even when they sound softest, because she will never look at me straight. I dislike her,' said Dinah, feeling her cheeks burn with shame and indignation, 'because she calls you "*Gaston*" when she speaks of you.'

At this terrible climax Mr. Arbuthnot laughed, so heartily that the quiet undulating sand hills echoed again. Far ahead Mrs. Linda might perhaps have caught the ring of his voice, have marvelled what subject people who had been married four mortal years could find to laugh about.

‘This is a black accusation. Happily, whatever her sins in my absence, Mrs. Thorne does not call me “Gaston” to my face.’

Dinah was silent. Gaston’s assurances had never carried the same weight with her since Saturday’s rose-show, the occasion when she learned of midnight adjournments to Dr. Thorne’s house, and of the singing of French songs after a certain mess dinner. Her own conscience was rigid. To suppress a truth was, according to Dinah’s code, precisely the same as to utter an untruth. She allowed no margin for her husband’s offhand histories—as a woman of larger mind would possibly have done. She could not see that carelessness, a quick imagination and an intense love of peace

were factors sufficiently strong to account for any little inconsistencies that might now and again creep into Gaston Arbuthnot's domestic confidences.

‘Of that I cannot judge. I suppose I ought not to care what Mrs. Thorne does or says in *my* absence.’

‘Of course you ought not. The speech is worthy of your thorough common-sense, Dinah.’

‘But Mrs. Thorne calls you “Gaston” to me, and I think it a very wretched, unkind thing to do. I think it mean.’

‘You ought not to think of it at all. Artist people are called by the first name that comes to hand.’

‘Mrs. Thorne is not an artist.’

‘She remembers me, in the old days when I knew Camors, as a budding one.’

‘And she corrects herself with over-care. Having once said “Gaston” it would be better not to go back to “Mr. Arbuthnot.”’

‘Ah, there, my dear girl, you are too

strong. If Linda Thorne excuses, she accuses herself, although I must confess I don't see the heinousness of her crime. You are becoming a casuist, Dinah.'

'Am I? It seems to me that I am remaining what I always was.'

They walked on, after this, mutually taciturn. The interest seemed to have gone from their talk. At last, just as they neared the first lights of Luc village, Dinah's fingers closed with significant tightness on her husband's arm.

'I have an important word to say to you, Gaston. All through our walk I have been wishing to bring it out, but I had not the courage.'

'Someone else calls me by my Christian name, perhaps? Or are we only to discuss more enormities of Linda Thorne's?'

There was a threat of impatience in Gaston Arbuthnot's voice. This little running accompaniment of domesticity gave a quite new character, he decided, to picnics, viewed as a means of social pleasure.

‘I was not thinking of Linda Thorne. I wanted to ask—Gaston, forgive me—if you would keep nearer to me till we get back to Guernsey?’

‘*Nearer!* Will not everybody be near everybody else on board the steamer? Don’t, I beg, ask me to do anything absurd,’ he added, with emphasis. ‘You have no idea how ready one’s best friends are to laugh at one under given circumstances.’

‘But if you were just to stop at my side on board—I mean, so that no one else could come near me.’

‘I will do nothing of the kind. You have no perception of the ridiculous, Dinah. It is a want in your nature. A woman with the slightest sense of humour would never wish her husband to be demonstrative before an audience.’

‘Demonstrative?’

‘Jealous might be nearer the mark. A variety of reasons could be given as to the miserable wretch’s motives in such a position. Jealous—of little Rex Basire, probably!’

Gaston Arbuthnot laughed. This time his laughter had no very hearty sound.

‘You must learn to be self-reliant,’ he went on presently. ‘Your first lesson in worldliness was to be taken to-day, remember. Well, you must go through with it! I was not especially anxious for you to join the party.’

‘You were not. I came to please myself only.’

‘And you have pleased yourself and me. You are the most charming woman present; and let me tell you these handsome Guernsey girls are formidable rivals. I am proud of you. The opening page of the lesson is a success. Don’t spoil it, Dinah, by picking a childish quarrel with me now.’

‘I am proud of you!’ The unexpected praise sent a thrill through Dinah’s heart.

Her petition to Gaston to keep near her was made in a very different spirit to that of childish quarrelling. On the road back from La Delivrande to Langrune it had come to pass that the walking party, following a natural law,

broke up into couples, and that Dinah, unprotected by Marjorie or by Geff, found herself alone with Lord Rex Basire. Being, for his age, a very thorough man of the world, Lord Rex uttered no word at which Mrs. Arbuthnot, or any sensible woman, could take umbrage. But his manner, his tones, his looks, were eloquent with a feeling which, to her straightforward, rustic perception of things, constituted an offence.

In the matter of admiration, Dinah, as I have said, was neither prude nor Puritan. She knew the greatness of her gift. It was an everyday experience to see heads turn wherever she walked upon the earth, and, being a quite natural and single-hearted daughter of the common Mother, such acknowledgment of her beauty had never yet been repugnant to her. But the admiration covertly expressed by Rex Basire as they sauntered slowly through chequered light and shadow back to Langrune, was of another nature. Instinct warned Dinah that, if she were an unmarried girl, she might

well read on this foolish young man's face and in his manner signs of love.

And the warning, to Gaston Arbathnot's wife, was, in itself, a humiliation.

She was unacquainted with the weapons by means of which differently nurtured women parry equivocal attention. Save from Linda Thorne's lips to-night she had never heard the term 'Platonic.' Geoffrey was her only friend. Of men like Lord Rex Basire she knew nothing. To gaze and hint and sigh after this tormenting fashion might, she thought, be a received habit among young officers of his rank. And the torment would soon be over—if Gaston would only keep near her on board the *Princess*! Once safely back in Guernsey, and Dinah felt she could take absolute care of herself for the future. There should be no more lingering afternoon visits, no more instruction in wool-work for Lord Rex Basire. Of the lesson learnt to-day, one paragraph, at least, was clear, should be reduced to practice before another twenty-four

hours went by. If Gaston would only keep near her in the interval !

But at Gaston's praise she forgot everything. In the sweetness of that unlooked-for avowal, '*I am proud of you,*' all dread of the future, all unpleasant recollections of the past, were swept clean away out of Dinah's brain. She would not risk the moment's happiness by another word. Her hand trembled, as though they had gone back to the old romantic days at Lesser Cheriton, as it rested on Gaston's arm.

'Proud of me ! Ah, my love,' she whispered, 'I hope that you and I will never have a worse quarrel than this while we live.'

And when the pair of married sweethearts emerged into the glare of lamps outside Luc Casino, Dinah's face was radiant. Lord Rex, devotedly attentive at the moment to pretty Rosie Verschoyle, saw, and felt mystified. Decidedly, the Methodistic heart, like the Methodistic conscience, was a book wherein Rex Basire might not read.

Linda Thorne approached at once ; a tall figure, diaphanous, graceful, in the lamplight. An Indian shawl was on Linda's arm, one of those exquisite dull-hued 'cachemires capable of investing the plainest woman with ephemeral poetry. Her hand held a bunch of wild flowers, a long trail of bindweed was twined, by fingers not unversed in millinery, round her hat.

'I hope you approve my ball attire?' She asked this with a little curtsy, her eyes addressing Gaston rather than Gaston's wife. 'Our hosts tell us that we have all free entrance to the Casino, the result, I suspect, of some liberal bribe to the Administration. Really, the way our subalterns have preconcerted every detail of their picnic has quite a Monte Christo flavour. You are engaged to me, remember, Mr. Arbuthnot, for your first waltz.'

'There will be neither first nor last, Mrs. Thorne. I exhausted the very small dancing power that is in me on Hortense and Eulalie this afternoon. I have not waltzed with a

partner, over seven, for years,' added Gaston. 'My step dates from the days of Louis Philippe.'

Nevertheless he moved away from Dinah ; he followed whithersoever Mrs. Thorne might choose to lead.

She chose the Luc dunes—that broad belt of wind-blown sand, held together by coarse grasses or sea thistles, which stretches the entire length of the straggling village, and forms a welcome contrast to the burnt-up turf terrace, with burnt-up geraniums, mildewed urns, and peeling stucco goddesses of loftier watering-places.

This evening Luc was merry-making. There were fireworks, there was a procession of torches, one of those ever-recurring processions by which the hearts of Parisian children, big and little, are gladdened at the seaside. Tiny figures marched, two and two, with Chinese lamps along the village causeway. A band of small boys evoked martial melody from drum and fife. Catherine-wheels rotated,

rockets scurried up into space. By-and-by an artfully constructed bonfire of colza stalks flared up in the centre of the place. Hand linked in hand the children danced around it.

‘ Nous irons aux bois,
Les lauriers sont coupés.’

Their shrill voices rang across the dunes. Gaston Arbuthnot could descry his friends, Hortense and Eulalie, wildly circling around the red flames with the rest. As he did so, he thought involuntarily of his sketch-book, forgotten from the moment when the children laid violent hands upon him, hours ago, until this instant.

‘ Oh, I know! Your sketch-book is gone,’ cried Linda, as he felt in pocket after pocket. ‘ This is the Nemesis that falls on creatures of impulse, Mr. Arbuthnot.’

‘ But it is no joking matter. Every memorandum I have made during the last month—gone!’

For once Gaston’s voice was tragic. He

knew full well the market value of those rough notes of his.

‘Every memorandum—from your first bit of Sarnian still life, an old market-woman dozing, knitting-pins in hand, at her stall, down to our fisher-girl of the Boulevards. Taking into account the studies of Rahnee and of myself, there must be literally scores of valuable jottings in that book.’

‘You are laughing at me? No, I divine! You have taken care of my book, Mrs. Thorne, like the dear good——’

Fortunately, Gaston Arbuthnot broke off. Would Mrs. Thorne, would any woman, still conscious of youth and charm, forgive the man who, in exuberance of gratitude, should say to her, ‘like the dear good creature I know you to be’?

‘I have taken care of your sketches,’ she answered, drawing the book forth from beneath her cachemire. ‘I have done more. You ask sometimes why I always carry a housewife in my pocket. You shall see the part my house-

wife has played to-day. While I sat quietly with Robbie and Mrs. Verschoyle (the young people, *very rightly*, enjoying themselves elsewhere) I sewed all your ragged leaves together for you—thus.'

Linda Thorne was a notably clever worker. Perhaps the length of her stitches, the breadth of her hems, were not always in accordance with the orthodox feminine standard. She could effect things with her needle—such as fine-drawing a rent in cloth, or improvising an anchorage for a buttonless collar—which might be the despair of many a mistress of the craft. She did her stitching with brains.

At an out-of-the way Indian station, so the legend ran, Mrs. Linda, under stress of some unlooked-for gaiety, once manufactured an evening waistcoat for her Robbie, and a pair of neat white satin boots for herself at a sitting.

'This is capital!' cried Arbuthnot joyfully, recovering possession of his sketches. 'Each page hinged on with a splendid contrivance of red silk to the dislocated remains of back. I

have often wanted Dinah to devise some sort of surgery for my veteran sketch-books. She must take a lesson by this.'

'Oh, no, no! Mrs. Arbuthnot is a far better needlewoman than I am. When I sew anything tolerably,' said Linda, 'it is by accident. I must have a motive for what I do. If I lived with—I mean, now, if dear Robbie were an artist, it would be my passion to help him in all the mechanical part of his work. If I were staying with you—and Mrs. Arbuthnot—you would discover that I can, really, in my way be useful. Michael Angelo, himself, must have had a poor obscure someone to grind his paints for him.'

The pathetic image of Robbie as an artist made Gaston laugh inwardly. He was not struck by the humour of hearing his own name coupled with Michael Angelo's. Nay, it might be well, he thought, if Dinah felt this passion of unselfish helpfulness; well, if Dinah occasionally gave him the kind of praise he got from Linda Thorne. For Dinah never flat-

tered. Her words of encouragement, unlettered country girl though she was, were full of soundest criticism. There was no honey in them. True love has its intuitions. Dinah knew that to feed this man on constantly sugared words was to poison him. She would gladly have seen in Gaston a noble discontent, gladly have listened to less frank avowals that he had found his level, and got on pretty well, there! Dinah, in short, was not a delightful acquaintance, but a steadfast, loyal wife. And her praise, in common with that of other steadfast wives, was apt to take the wholesome bitterness, the slightly sub-acid flavour of a tonic.

‘Michael Angelo. My dear Mrs. Thorne, how much, how very much you over-estimate me! If you spoke of me as imitating, from afar, the little affected prettinesses of a Greuze, the compliment would be too high.’

‘I fixed my standard for you, years ago, Mr. Arbuthnot. In the days when you used to thank me—*mè*, a governess—for playing dance-

music at Madame Benjamin's, I had my convictions as to the place you would one day occupy in Art.'

At other times—on the morning, for instance, when we first saw the Arbuthnot trio in the garden of Miller's Hotel—Linda remembered her aspirations as to the place her friend would, one day, hold in the House of Commons. But Gaston, if he noted the discrepancy, passed it generously over. Hard for a man to believe a charming woman insincere, simply because she a little over-estimates his own genius!

'Those light-hearted salad days! When I was with de Camors this afternoon——'

'The effusive little Frenchman who so nearly kissed you?'

'As long as I forgot the children, and the twelve stone of mamma, and the fact that de Camors himself is growing bald, I could have believed he and I were six-and-thirty again. Six-and-thirty used to be the sum of our joint ages.'

‘Do not talk of age. It is a subject about which a man may jest, while a woman just breaks her heart.’

And Linda extended towards him her thin adroit hands, clasped in a pose that she had studied, not unsuccessfully, as one of pained entreaty.

‘Women are younger, relatively, than men,’ answered Gaston, with the sincerity of his sex. ‘When I was two-and-twenty, Dinah’s age, I knew more of the world than I know now. Whereas my wife——’

‘Ah! your wife,’ interrupted Linda Thorne, the mask for a moment dropping, her voice hardening. ‘I was thinking of living, palpitating, flesh-and-blood women—inhabitants of a world where nothing is faultless save over-faultless perfection. I—I mean,’ she went on, rapidly recovering her self-control, ‘that at thirty (and I am past thirty, alas! who looks at me under broad daylight but must see it?)—at thirty a man is scarcely in the noonday sun—a woman already feels the breath of evening.’

Her one chill hope is—to grow old gracefully. Mrs. Arbuthnot is a girl still.’

‘And you—were a child when I first knew you in Paris,’ observed Gaston, cleverly quitting the dangerous territory across whose borders he has been betrayed. ‘How natural it seems, Mrs. Thorne, that we should be walking together, you and I, in the old country, with the old language round us again! Do you hear what the children are singing down on the sands yonder?’

Linda set herself to listen, her expressive hands clasped, her face bowed.

‘*Nous irons aux bois,
Les lauriers sont coupés*’—

shouted the shrill young Gallican voices in the distance.

Mr. Arbuthnot repeated the nursery rhyme, as Murger wove it into his delightful ‘Letter to a Cousin.’

‘*Nous n’irons plus aux bois. Les lauriers sont coupés.
Nous n’irons plus aux bois, oh, ma cousine Angèle!*’

The lady at his side bowed her face lower, and believed, in all integrity, that she was about to be overtaken by tears. Mrs. Linda, to do her justice, was not of a lachrymose temperament. At the zenith of their boy and girl flirtation, years ago, she had never shed a tear for Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot; until he appeared with his beautiful wife, had, indeed, clean forgotten her youthful weakness and his existence. But she possessed considerable imagination, a gloss of surface sentiment. She was also an insatiate novel reader, and had fallen into the habit of perennial strong emotion, leading nowhere. She could realise how a woman who had loved ought to feel, as she recalled past happiness with the lover of the past—both married, and one, alas! fast nearing an age when the most pathetic drama turns, without help from the burlesque writers, into parody.

Linda Thorne believed herself to be on the brink of tears. Gaston Arbuthnot believed so, too, and his heart could not but soften over the

poor thing's impressibility. So widely different in effect are tears shed in bitter earnest by one's wife, and tears shed in pretty make-believe by the wife of another man.

'Do you hear, Mr. Arbuthnot—the dancers have changed their tune?' She asked this as the children, eddying like spirit-figures in an opera scene round the fire, broke into a new measure, '*Marie, soak thy bread in wine!*'—universal refrain of all French children from the Pyrenees to the Channel. "'*Marie, soak thy bread!*" How that foolish rhyme brings back the Benjamins' salon, and my place behind the piano, and you, Mr. Arbuthnot, handing round refreshments with the small slave-driver, Moïse! "*Marie, soak thy bread*" . . . Alas!'—Mrs. Thorne's utterances grew mystic—'We women have to soak our bread in sour enough wine, have we not?'

'The Benjamin refreshments—sugar-water, orgeat,' mused Gaston Arbuthnot, keeping safely to the practical. 'Yes, those were

charming evenings, especially when Papa Moïse did not sing. I remember, as though 'twere yesterday, how my poor mother used to suspect Madame Benjamin of putting bad almonds in the orgeat.'

CHAPTER XIII.

FOR AULD LANG SYNE.

MEANTIME, whilst this mature pair of sentimentalists recalled the past under the starlight, the younger people, sound of heart and limb, were making the most of the present inside the walls of Luc Casino. Fine weather for their voyage, an excellent French dinner, and now a ball, with distractingly pretty girls for partners, what further enjoyment could hearts as light as the hearts of the subaltern hosts desire?

Lord Rex, only, played spectator. While Rosie Verschoyle danced waltz, polka, American, to outward seeming in gayer spirits than her wont, Lord Rex remained fixed in his attendance on Mrs. Arbuthnot, beside one of

the open ball-room doors. Dinah was curiously staunch of purpose, about trifles as about serious things. She clung to 'first principles.' It was a first principle with her never to enter a casino, English or French, and Rex Basire vainly expended his best special pleading in seeking to change her.

Mrs. Arbuthnot objected, perhaps, to waltz with a one-armed man? Would she give him a polka, then? Would she 'rush' an American quadrille? It made it ever so much more diverting if one did not know the figures of an American. Well, if she would not dance at all, would she take his arm and walk round the rooms? 'Simply to put them in their place, Mrs. Arbuthnot. I have my British vanity. I want these bragging Frenchmen, accustomed to nothing handsomer than lay-figures out of the pattern books, to see *you*.'

All in vain. Dinah wished neither to dance nor to dazzle. Only, if Lord Rex pleased—thus, after a space, she admonished him—it would be wise for his lordship to join the rest

of his party. Miss Verschoyle was standing out; there could not be a likelier time than the present for him to secure Miss Verschoyle's hand.

His lordship, however, did not please. And so, when Gaston and Linda Thorne returned later on from their walk, the first fact patent to both on entering the ball-room was Dinah's absence. With a quick look around, Linda discerned Rosie Verschoyle standing at her mother's side, partnerless.

'Rosie Verschoyle a wall-flower? Oh, this is too bad! What can Lord Rex be thinking of?' exclaimed Linda, ingenuously. 'Mr. Arbuthnot, I insist upon your asking poor little Rosie to dance at once.'

'I thought you and I were to take pity on each other, Mrs. Thorne, for auld lang syne?'

'Think of Rosie, not me. It is positively wicked for old married women to monopolise the dancing men while girls stand out.'

'Are you sure Miss Verschoyle would care to have a man with deposited affections for

her partner? a veteran whose waltz step dates from the reign of Louis Philippe?’

‘Try her. In my young days girls would sooner dance with anybody than remain partnerless.’

‘That “anybody” gives me confidence. It is good to know the exact compartment in which one is pigeon-holed.’

Gaston crossed the room. He made his bow before Rosie, who moved forward graciously. Now that Mr. Arbuthnot had asked her, said the girl, in her thin staccato, she would have the enjoyment of one really good waltz. Something in Gaston’s looks made her certain that he was a splendid dancer. Louis Philippe? Mr. Arbuthnot’s step dated from the days of Louis Philippe? ‘Why that,’ cried Rosie, ‘was before we were all born!’ She confessed to never remembering about those ‘horrid French Revolution people,’ but had a notion Louis Philippe came next to the king who got his head cut off. Or was he Egalité, the man who insisted upon dying in his boots?

‘ Louis Philippe came next to the king who got his head cut off,’ said Gaston, as his arm clasped her well-rounded waist. ‘I had no idea, Miss Versehoyle, that you were such a profound historian.’

Linda Thorne took the chair left vacant beside Rosie’s mother.

‘Your dear child is looking her best, Mrs. Verschoye. I think our Guernsey roses do us national credit. We ought to produce an effect upon the foreign mind.’

‘The young people are too much flushed, every one of them. A day like this may lay the seeds of life-long malady. I know, as a fact, Mrs. Thorne, that Rosie is dancing in wet shoes.’

‘Better dance than sit still in them,’ remarked Linda, cheerfully. ‘You never catch cold while you are amused.’

‘Could we not have been amused at a quarter the cost? I have been trying in my own mind to reckon up the expenses of the expedition. Putting everything at the lowest, I bring it to something fabulous—fabulous!

If these young subalterns, sons, no doubt, of needy men, had only given us a tea-drinking on L'Ancrese Common ! When Colonel Verschoyle was in command——'

The time when her colonel commanded a regiment in Guernsey was Mrs. Verschoyle's one unchequered recollection, the standard by which all subsequent mortal events must be judged !

'When poor Colonel Verschoyle was in command, that is what the officers used to do. Give us a tea-drinking at L'Ancrese and a dance for the young people afterwards. No show. Very little expense. Everybody pleased. Then, of course, if you got your shoes wet you could change them.'

The advantages of L'Ancrese over Langrune as a spot whereat to change your shoes seemed to touch Mrs. Verschoyle nearly. Her eyes filled.

'The money that has gone on all this,' she mourned ; 'not to speak of the doctors' bills we may have to pay hereafter ! When first the

plan was chalked out I foresaw how everything would end. I entreated Rosie to reason with Lord Rex. Unfortunately I can never get my children to listen to me.'

'You should have gained over Mrs. Arbuthnot,' said Linda, with a spice of malice. 'As the picnic was got up for her, no doubt she could have amended the programme.'

Mrs. Verschoyle looked more like a little bewildered white mouse than usual, as this newly propounded idea made its way slowly to her intelligence.

'It is a most unprecedented thing! To get up a party of pleasure for a married lady without daughters! Mrs. Arbuthnot, I believe, has no daughters?—at all events not of an age to be introduced. Well, she is a very sweet-looking young woman,' said the meek, motherly soul, through whose lips no breath of scandal ever passed. 'Mrs. Arbuthnot has just that fair, placid, large look that used to be so much admired in my Flo. But the complexion is too transparent for health. Did I

tell you Flo's husband was ordered to Malta? His regiment is on this season's reliefs, and Flo talks of coming over to me with the children—four babies, and a native nurse. I suppose I shall be able to take them all in?'

'Easily. You have only to give up your own room and sleep in the conservatory. When Rahnee is married and offers to come home, with four babies and a native nurse, sleeping in the conservatory,' observed Linda, 'is just the kind of sacrifice I shall be prepared to make.'

'You would have the old jungle ague back upon you in twenty-four hours if you did. Neither you nor Doctor Thorne are people who should take liberties with yourselves. Indeed, I think you have both been looking sadly this spring. Rosie, my dear, come here.' For the waltz had ended. Gaston Arbuthnot was walking past, English fashion, his partner on his arm. 'Come and sit down by me out of the draught. I do hope this is the last dance we shall stay for, Mr. Arbuthnot?'

‘No, indeed, mamma. We are to stay for the next. It is another waltz, and I am engaged for it to Lord Rex,’ Rosie glanced, a little ruefully, towards the door where Dinah and Lord Rex still stood. ‘Thank you so much, Mr. Arbuthnot, for our beautiful waltz. I hope,’ said Rosie Verschoyle, ‘all my partners, as long as I live, will have taken dancing lessons in the reign of Louis Philippe.’

‘When the opening bars of the waltz sounded, Lord Rex, with no very great alacrity, came across the room to claim Rosie’s hand. Gaston Arbuthnot bent over Linda.

“‘For auld lang syne.” Is this to be our dance, Mrs. Thorne?’

Linda Thorne was not a pretty, not by natural gift a graceful, woman. She was a perfect dancer. Poor Dinah, from her hiding-place, had found a genuine pleasure in watching Gaston waltz with dimpled, smiling, Rosie Verschoyle. For Dinah, like all wholesome-minded mortals, had unmixed sympathy with the spirits and enjoyment of light-hearted girl-

hood. She looked with very different perceptions at Linda Thorne, looked at her with something of the feeling a true but unpopular artist might know on watching the facile successes of meretricious talent. This tinselled, pleasure-loving Linda, with her clinging draperies, her Indian perfumes—this wife whose heart was not with her husband, this mother who contentedly could leave her child to servants—was so far below the ideal towards which, since her marriage, Dinah Arbuthnot had faithfully striven.

Below an ideal standard. And yet, in such vital points as talking amusing talk, in dancing, dressing, dinner-giving, in the all-important matter of pleasing men difficult to please like Gaston Arbuthnot, how immeasurably was Linda her superior! Dinah's heart contracted. She was just going to shift away into deeper shadow, when a hand touched her arm with friendly purpose. Turning, she saw Marjorie Bartrand, —Cassandra Tighe, laden with nets and specimen boxes, in the rear.

Marjorie's face glowed damask. 'A pity you were not with us, Mrs. Arbuthnot. We have been having a glorious time, moth-hunting in the Luc lanes, Miss Tighe and I, and—and—every now and then Mr. Geoffrey Arbuthnot condescended to join when the chase got warm. What are you all about here?' Marjorie ascended a step, she took a smiting glance round the ball-room. 'Well, this is as good as a sermon. Miss Tighe, come and be edified. Is it not fine to see middle-aged couples waltzing for the public good?'

With a little scornful gesture of the head Marjorie indicated Gaston and his partner.

'Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot may be doing his steps from personal motives, perhaps because he has the "artistic temperament," whatever,' said Marjorie, 'that elastic term may mean. Nothing but severe principles, the determination to point a moral, could make Linda Thorne go through violent exercise on a night like this.'

'Linda Thorne is considered the best waltzer in Guernsey,' said Cassandra. 'Your tongue is

over-sharp. You speak before you think, Marjorie Bartrand.'

'I feel before I do either,' whispered the girl, her hand stealing back, with half-shy kindness, to Dinah's arm.

'If Mrs. Arbuthnot had been with us,' said Cassandra, 'she would have witnessed a sight worth laughing at. Marjorie scoffs at middle-aged partners. What would you think, Mrs. Arbuthnot, of a white-haired woman flying across hedges and ditches—breathless with excitement, over the capture of a butterfly? Scarce a dozen specimens of *Pontia Daplidice* have been seen in Northern Europe during the last twenty years,' went on old Cassandra, flushed still with victory. 'And of these six only were netted, like mine, on the wing. Why, it would be worth staying a week here—a week, a month, on the outside chance of sighting a second *Pontia Daplidice* !'

CHAPTER XIV.

MISSING.

ALL this time the *Princess*, lying well outside the Luc rocks, was getting up her steam. Before the waltz had ended a red light, hung from the vessel's bows, gave the signal for those on shore to hurry their departure. There was a flutter of airy dresses as the English party emerged from the ball-room into darkness, a ripple of talk as they filed, Indian fashion, hand steadying hand, down the narrow path that led from the casino to the little fishing slip or jetty.

And then unexpectedly came the first misadventure that had arisen to mar this day of calm and sunshine. When the party had embarked in two of the unwieldy flat-bottomed

boats of the country, it occurred to Lord Rex, as commander-in-chief, that their number should be counted. And soon the cry arose that one was wanting! Seventeen human souls left Guernsey that morning—on this point all were confident. Sixteen human souls only were forthcoming now. And no efforts of memory, individual or collective, could hit upon the defaulter's name.

Mrs. Verschoyle explained in a hollow voice that it was a most uncomfortable omen. She would be sorry to depress the younger people's spirits, but, for her part, she would sooner set sail in the teeth of a hurricane than have had this thing occur. 'Let the counting be more systematic,' said the poor lady, jumping to her feet, and for once in her life launching into independent action. 'Let me repeat each name slowly, beginning with the youngest of the gentlemen, and let each person answer as he is called. Mr. Smith? Brown? Jones? Lord Rex? The two Mr. Arbuthnots? Doctor Thorne?'

After Doctor Thorne's name there was a

moment's silence. Then Linda, tragic of accent, ejaculated, 'Robbie! Of course!' And then, I regret to say, most of the younger people began to laugh. 'But it may be a matter of life and death,' cried Mrs. Thorne. 'If you please, Lord Rex, I will go on shore at once. The *Princess* may start, probably will start, without me. My duty is to look for Robbie. Oh, I am most uneasy! It is all my selfishness. Robbie ought never to have been brought on such an expedition. I am certain something has happened to him! I shall never forgive myself while I live.'

These amiable anxieties were the exact sentiments suited to the occasion. Mrs. Thorne expressed them with agitated dignity, and, of course, no one laughed again. Consolations, even, were forthcoming. Doctor Thorne had been seen, in the flesh, outside Luc Casino; or, if not the Doctor, some old gentleman exactly like him, with a puggaree, sand-shoes, a white umbrella, and smoking an enormous cigar, just like the cigar poor dear Doctor Thorne always

used to smoke. It was the prettiest, least wise of the de Carteret sisters who offered this bit of evidence. The gentleman was observed to look in for awhile at the dancing, and then to walk away in the direction, Ada de Carteret believed, of the sea.

‘The sea! And who can tell that the sea has not surrounded him! In out-of-the-way French places the tide always swells up with a circuit.’ Tears were in Linda’s voice as she proclaimed this maritime fact. ‘I am most uneasy.’ She adjusted her Indian shawl with grace round her shoulders, then skipped lightly to land. ‘Robbie ought never to have been brought—it was all my selfishness—I am torn in pieces by remorse.’

The young ladies, with the exception of one flint soul, cried, ‘No, no,’ in chorus. Mrs. Thorne positively must not say these dreadful things, when every one knew she had such a *character* for unselfishness! Mrs. Verschoyle felt for her smelling-salts, then settled herself gloomily down, prepared for the worst. Mrs.

Verschoyle felt within her the courage of a prophet whose own dark sayings are on the eve of fulfilment.

Gaston Arbuthnot, in his quiet, unmoved manner, rose. Stepping on shore, Gaston volunteered to go in search of the missing Doctor.

These were just the scenes wherein Linda so infinitely diverted him—Frenchman as he was in three-fourths of his nature—little scenes in which, on the boards of domestic life, she played such admirable farce without knowing it!

‘I shall walk straight back to Langrune, Mrs. Thorne. Notwithstanding your solemn tone, in spite of Miss de Carteret’s evidence, I believe the Doctor has never missed any of us, and at this moment is smoking his cigar, possibly sipping his “little glass,” at the Hotel Château-briand.’

‘Unless you are here in a quarter of an hour, sharp, we shall leave you behind,’ called out Lord Rex, when Gaston had proceeded some

paces on his errand. 'The *Princess* is chartered until to-morrow only. Whatever the rest of us do, the skipper will take care not to lose his tide.'

Linda Thorne, by this time in her agitation, and her Indian shawl, was at Gaston's side. So the exordium might be taken as addressed to them both.

'All right,' answered Mr. Arbuthnot leisurely. 'Langrune is not the end of the earth. If by the time we secure the Doctor, the steamer has weighed anchor, we must all get back to Guernsey, viâ Cherbourg. That would fit in very well. The *Lady of the Isles* crosses from Cherbourg to-morrow,' went on Gaston, raising his voice as he looked back over his shoulder towards the boats. 'We should just have time to visit the dockyard before starting.'

And then the two figures sped onward, side by side. They were watched with keen speculative interest by the occupants of the boats. No one, save simple Mrs. Verschoyle, felt disturbed as to the Doctor's ultimate fate. Was

an old gentleman who had taken admirable care of himself for forty years in India, a likely subject to be spirited away on the sands, between Luc and Langrune? But the situation had a dramatic piquancy that stirred even the unimaginative minds of the Miss de Carterets and their attendant subalterns. For there was Dinah! Impossible to forget that Mrs. Gaston Arbuthnot, that lowly-born young woman with the beautiful eyes, and set, sad mouth, was also watching the two figures as they disappeared in the darkness.

‘A quarter of an hour. By Jove! ten minutes of that quarter must be nearly gone.’

And taking out his watch, Lord Rex struck a vesuvian in order to learn the time. It was exactly eight minutes to nine, and at nine, sharp, the *Princess* was to weigh her anchor. The moment for action had come. Now, what was the wisest thing to do? One point seemed certain—it was useless for both boats to wait longer. Let the smaller boat, at the head of

the jetty, start for the steamer at once, let the captain be told what had happened, and asked to put off his departure as long as practicable. If Gaston Arbuthnot and the Thornes arrived in time, the second boat would bring them off. If not—why, common sense could really dictate no better plan than Gaston's own. Langrune was not the end of the world. A railway to Cherbourg existed. The *Lady of the Isles* would no doubt bring the lost sheep comfortably back to their respective folds to-morrow.

Dinah as it happened was, with Ada de Carteret and the elder ladies, in the boat at the head of the jetty. And soon before Dinah's eyes, as before the eyes of one who dreams, the reflections of the Casino lamps, the children's Chinese lanterns, were dancing with fairy-like brightness across the moving water. She realised that her day of pleasure was over, that every one—yes, she could catch the voices of Marjorie and of Geff, holding merry talk in the other boat—every one took the adventure jestingly, and that her heart felt like lead, that

her hands were ice-cold, that each breath she drew was a conscious and painful effort. Well—if she had enough bodily strength to act her part out, she thought, say no word to betray her plebeian emotions, and so bring down ridicule on her husband or herself, she must be content! Once on board the steamer she could hide herself in the cabin, away from sight, and there wait, until the comedy (or tragedy) had reached its next act. This one wretched comfort remained to her. She would be able to screen herself, for awhile at least, from observation—to be alone!

But a new and still more diverting incident was about to be woven into the text of the play.

‘If I were not in such a nervous state,’ cried Mrs. Verschoye, when the boat was within three or four lengths of the *Princess*, ‘if I were not so morally shaken that I distrust my own senses, I should say our good Doctor was on board. There came a flash of light just now beside the wheel, the lighting, perhaps, of a

fusee, and for a second it seemed to me that I saw Doctor Thorne's figure distinctly. A pity some reliable person was not looking !'

And Mrs. Verschoyle, to her own surprise, had seen correctly. The Doctor it proved to be—the Doctor smoking one of the ship's best cheroots, and enjoying the summer night with unruffled innocence. He advanced gallantly to assist the ladies in their embarkation, and heard with gusto the story of his own supposed fate. Surrounded by the tide? Tut, tut! Linda might have known, had she exercised her reason, whither he had betaken himself. 'Only you ladies never do reason,' said the Doctor, addressing Mrs. Verschoyle. 'It was growing damp on shore—and let me give you a bit of advice, my dear madam: whenever you feel that clinging kind of chill, after gun-fire, get on board ship, if you have the chance. Get an honest plank, instead of the abominable miasmal emanations of Mother Earth, under your feet. Yes, yes,' went on the Doctor comfortably, 'I hailed one of the *Princess's* boats and came

on board, two hours ago, have drunk my cup of coffee, and beaten Ozanne at his own game, cribbage.'

'And your wife's anxiety?'

'My dear Mrs. Verschoyle, I am penitent! Only my wife, you see, might have reasoned. It would have deprived you all, no doubt, of a harmless excitement; but Linda, I think, might have reasoned. Any way, it is better to be drowned by one's friends' imaginations than run the risk, in earnest, of a pair of damp shoes.'

To this Mrs. Verschoyle gave a qualified assent. The mention of damp shoes affected her. Still, she was not a little shocked at Doctor Thorne's levity—'At his advanced age,' thought poor Mrs. Verschoyle, perturbedly, 'and after the awful narrowness of his escape!'

'The fear is, Doctor, that Mrs. Thorne will be left behind,' cried Ada de Carteret, with meaning. 'At the first word of danger Linda started off along the Langrune road to look for you.'

'Linda ought to have reasoned——'

‘And Lord Rex declares the captain must weigh anchor at nine sharp! It is like a scene in a novel—the last scene but one, with everything in a delicious tangle still. Why, Doctor, you are the hero of the day!’

‘I feel enormously flattered,’ said the old Doctor. ‘It is a very long time since a charming young lady has said anything so pretty to me.’

‘But your wife, Doctor Thorne!’ expostulated Cassandra Tighe, who with her nets and cases had been the last to leave the boat. ‘Do you realise that if Ozanne saves his tide—if we return to Guernsey to-night—Mrs. Thorne will remain in France?’

‘I cannot believe it. Ozanne would not surely be so ungallant. (Allow me, Miss Tighe, to help you with a few of your packages.) No, no. The skipper would not be so ungallant. And then my dear Linda is the most famous traveller! Surely I have told you what wonderful presence of mind she showed once in the Nilgiri Hills? Lost, actually lost, for four entire

days! If, by mischance, Linda should be left alone, she will make her way home to-morrow, viâ Cherbourg, and enjoy the adventure.'

'And Mrs. Thorne is not alone,' cried Ada de Carteret, clapping her hands, and no doubt feeling that the position grew more and more deliciously tangled. 'Mr. Arbuthnot is with her—not Marjorie Bartrand's coach, but the other one: the singing, flirting, good-looking Mr. Arbuthnot,' added this vivacious young lady, profoundly forgetful that the good-looking Mr. Arbuthnot's wife stood within three yards of her elbow.

'Then my fears are set at rest,' observed the Doctor genially. 'If my friend Arbuthnot is there my fears are set thoroughly at rest. Meanwhile, I may as well speak to the skipper. The tide, of course, must be saved. Still, it would be only right to let Ozanne know how affairs stand.'

And Dinah had listened to it all—youthful jest, aged philosophy, all! And standing among the others, with a queer sensation that she had

suddenly oldened by a dozen years, some pallid ghost of a smile rose to her lips. Here was a grand opportunity, verily, of learning a lesson at first hand, a chance in a thousand for readjusting one's standard, for observing the nicer little shades of feeling and usage which prevail in the world to which one would fain belong.

A smile, I say, rose to Dinah's lips. Which of us does not remember how, in sharp mental stress, he has found himself looking on at the trivial accessories of his pain, as a stranger might, derisively! In the poor girl's heart was death.

She knew that for Gaston to have set at naught her pleadings, for Gaston to have quitted her thus, might render to-night a bitter crisis in the lives of both.

CHAPTER XV.

LINDA WARMS TO HER PART.

BUT Dinah was not unobserved, not uncared for.

If Cassandra Tighe's taste for piquant situation once in a hundred times led her astray, the ninety-nine good offices performed by the kindly old maid in the interval were sufficient, surely, to atone for the single blunder.

Cassandra's heart went out towards Dinah at the first moment when the fair sad face passed before her in the garden of Miller's Hotel. She had listened with regret to stories of Gaston's fickleness—even while her talents as a narrator assisted in giving such stories wider currency—had felt remorse, sharp and hard, for her own unwitting share in the 'Arbuthnot drama.' At this hour of which I

write, Dinah standing mute, wan, beside her, Cassandra's breast kindled with renewed compassion towards the simple unbefriended country girl, a compassion none the less genuine in that it went somewhat wide of Dinah's actual and present trouble.

'You look thoroughly done up, my dear Mrs. Arbuthnot. I am afraid to-day's gadding about has been too much for you. Let us see,' said Cassandra, in a whisper, 'if we cannot find some quiet corner, you and I, where we may settle down and rest.'

Dinah turned on her a look of blank, un-answering pain. She wanted neither sympathy nor support, wanted only to creep below, out of sight, to avoid all temptation to disobedience, all possibility of bringing down ridicule—on Gaston!

'I feel chilled—nothing, that is, to speak of. You are very good, Miss Tighe, but I had rather go down to the saloon alone, please. I am used to being alone, and—and I have a cloak which I must look for.'

A note of suppressed passion was in her voice. It betrayed emotion curiously at variance with the commonplace words, the staid reserved manner. And, in a moment, Cassandra Tighe's valorous spirit had armed itself for action.

'Dr. Thorne, will you stop that Luc boat, if you please? Never mind my nets, they can go anywhere. Attendez, matelots! Attendez moi,' cried Cassandra in her own peculiar French, and signalling with her handkerchief to the boat, already a few lengths distant from the steamer. 'It would scarcely do, Doctor, to let matters shape themselves with such very slight rough-hewing! Some one must go ashore without delay. Think of Linda's anxiety if the *Princess* should leave before she had been assured of your safety!'

'I think of many things,' said Dr. Thorne, with humour, 'the dampness of the night pre-eminently. Of course, I must go. Still, Linda might have exercised her reason, such reason as Providence bestows on the sex. Linda is

not a child. What possible good could come from this kind of wild-geese chase?'

And the old Doctor moved an inch or two, exceedingly crusty of mien, in the direction of the companion ladder.

But this was not the plan of Cassandra Tighe's campaign.

'You will just stay comfortably where you are; you will keep a dry plank under your feet, Doctor Thorne, and give me carte blanche to look after your wife. If the *Princess* starts without us, Linda and I must find our way back to Guernsey. I have a purse in my pocket, Linda has a brain in her head. We both know how to travel. To you, Mrs. Arbuthnot, I confide my treasure.' Turning round she gave Dinah a little chip box, clasping the girl's cold hands for an instant as she did so. 'Take care of *Pontia Daplidice*, my dear, and take care of yourself. Look for your cloak by all means. Doctor Thorne, do you persuade Ozanne to give us every possible moment's leave. I have a presentiment that all

will come right, that your good wife's over-anxiety will not lead her into mischief.'

The unwieldy Luc boat was by this time swaying to and fro at the bottom of the ladder. A Luc fisherman stood, with bare brawny arms extended, for Cassandra's reception. A few seconds later Cassandra and boat, alike, had become a dark spot on the water, luminous now with the quick-moving facets of the rising tide. Dinah was alone, indeed!

She stood, for a time, mechanically watching the row of lights on shore, mechanically listening to the steam as it puffed, with energy unmistakable, from the funnels of the *Princess*. Then, uncertain of tread, heavy of limb as of heart, she groped her way below, resolved, silently, to endure whatever fate the coming half-hour may have in store for her.

The cabin lamps were as yet unlighted. Dinah entered the ladies' saloon, at hazard. She sank down on the couch nearest the door. Then, burying her face between her hands, she strove, with might, to collect her thoughts, to

stifle the resentment against Gaston which conscience, sternly just, already condemned as paltry—ungenerous.

It was of her own perverse will that she accepted Rex Basire's invitation. How often had Gaston warned her that, with her temper, her opinions, she would find 'society' a dangerous experiment; a game in which she would be likely to stake gold against other players' counters! She had come here to-day to please herself. She had no right of control over her husband's actions. Gaston lived according to the light of his own conscience, not hers. He was courteous by temperament, fond of little unforeseen deviations from any laid-down programme, prompt, always, in putting his time, his energy, himself, at the service of his friends.

'Langrune is not the end of the earth.' She recalled his cheery, amused tone, as he was vanishing with Linda across the dunes. 'If the *Princess* should start without us, we must get back by Cherbourg to-morrow. It will fit

in very well.' She remembered Doctor Thorne—his self-possession, his confidence in Gaston. 'If my friend Arbuthnot is there, one's fears are set at rest.' She could imagine Linda's witty reproduction of the whole too delicious accident when they should get back to Guernsey. Oh, let her gain mastery over herself—mastery! Let to-day's lesson be a deeper one than can be gained by nice observance of tone, or look, or manner. Let her have learned to conquer small jealousies, to be wary of quick judgments, to construe the actions, the intentions of others, nobly.

Dinah resolved in the spirit to be strong. Meanwhile, she realised, with growing certitude, that she was weak, exceedingly, in the flesh. Her breath came with greater effort, her hands grew colder and more clammy. Rising with difficulty, she set herself to search for her cloak among a pyramid of wraps that lay, disordered, on a neighbouring couch, dimly discernible by aid of a newly-lighted lamp from the main cabin. Dinah Arbuthnot's cloak lay (can Fate

not be ironical even in the disposition of a heap of shawls?) immediately above a soft, long Indian scarf belonging to Mrs. Thorne. As she lifted it, the subtle Eastern perfume, associated always with Linda's presence, seemed to Dinah, in a second, to fill the cabin. A feeling of sickness, a sudden access of keen personal repulsion, took hold of her—all-powerful hold; for, this time, it was instinct, not reason, that moved her anger. She flung down her cloak, with a childish sense of disgust at having handled it. She sank back, passively, upon the sofa . . .

A few minutes later came in the steward to light the centre lamp. Seeing one of the guests alone, and deathly white, he took the common sense, or steward's view of the situation. Feeling queer, already? Let him get the lady a brandy-and-soda, a glass of wine, then? Settle the system before they got into rough water—though, for the matter of that, they would have a splendid passage. Sea like a millpond, tide favourable. Nothing but run-

ning into one of these here Channel fogs to be feared.

‘I will take some soda-water, if you please.’ Odd and far away Dinah’s voice sounded to herself. ‘I am a good sailor in general. I would rather have a rough sea than a smooth one. But this evening I am a little tired. I feel thirsty.’

She drank the soda-water with a sense of refreshment. ‘The wretchedest preparation, without the B., that could be made for a voyage,’ thought the steward, as he stood, salver in hand, waiting for her glass. Then, when the man had again left her alone, she crept back into her place, held her hands tight to her throat to relieve the cruel sensation that well-nigh choked her, and waited.

Waited—how long she knew not—perhaps, a short ten minutes only. In recalling the whole scene, later—the swell of the rising water, the murmur of voices in the adjacent cabin, the clinging, overpowering Indian perfume—in summing up, I say, each external

detail of that miserable evening, it would afterwards seem to Dinah Arbuthnot that no year of her life ever took so much hard living through as those mortal minutes.

At length they came to an end. Doubt was to be set at rest, or turned into yet sharper certainty. For she could tell, first by the muffled thud of rowlocks, then by the plash of oar blades in the water, that the second boat was arriving. She could distinguish Geoffrey's voice, Lord Rex Basire's, old Doctor Thorne's—very loud this last, and didactic, but yielding Dinah's heart no consolation. Would not Doctor Thorne talk loud and didactically whether his Linda had returned from her quest of him or not?

After a time the voices began to disperse. There came the measured yoy-a-hoy of the sailors, the shuffle of feet, the fall of cable on deck. Then Dinah heard the steward saying to one of the boys that they had weighed anchor. And not a moment too soon. With the air so thick, and the glass nohow, the skipper ought

to have started, on this badly buoyed coast, a couple of hours ago. A French pilot might be all very well, but to his, the steward's mind, English daylight was better.

Dinah knelt upon a sofa, inclined her face to the cool air of an open porthole, and watched the receding French coast. There lay the villages of Luc and Langrune, a line of lights flickering, misty and irregular, above the shimmer of the sea. Far away in the distance rose one larger light, the signal lantern in the tower of La Delivrande. Dinah watched, automatically. She noted scarcely more than a playgoer, carried away by excitement, notes the scene-painting at the most thrilling situation of a drama. To her, as to a child, the whole world was concentrated under the passion that governed herself. Had Gaston come back? She longed to know this with a longing which one must call to mind her narrow past life, her more than girlish simplicity, rightly to understand. And still she did not attempt to leave the cabin. Her strength, moral and physical,

seemed paralysed. How should she make her way, alone, up on deck, search in the darkness for Gaston, ask questions, parry, with a jest, such airy explanation of her husband's disappearance as might, on all sides, be offered her?

A voice, close at her elbow, made her start guiltily.

'No one in the ladies' saloon? Well, then, Mrs. Gaston Arbuthnot must have tumbled overboard. Her husband and I have vainly searched the *Princess* for her.' Oh, kindly Cassandra! Was no small bit of embroidery tacked on, just at this juncture, over the bare truth? 'So much for trusting valuable entomological specimens out of one's own hands!'

'Miss Tighe, I am here. I have been trying to get a little warm. Your moth is safe,' stammered Dinah.

She scarcely knew in what fashion the words left her dry and trembling lips.

'Moth? A country-bred girl like you not to know that a speckled white, although, by

luck, we caught him out of hours, is a butterfly ! Well, I have brought back our other pair of butterflies, safe and sound.' Before saying this Cassandra had put on her spectacles and carried her box beneath the doorway lamp. She made a great show of examining its contents, critically, thus allowing Dinah to recover her self-possession, unnoticed. 'From certain murmurings I overheard among the sailors I believe we, all three, narrowly escaped being abandoned to our fate.'

'Mrs. Thorne had begun to think that her husband was on board?'

Dinah's constrained tone was one of doubt rather than inquiry.

'My dear, nobody ever knows what Mrs. Thorne thinks. Linda is a charming woman, the pleasantest companion, when she chooses, in the world. But, as the Doctor says, Linda might reason. These electric transitions, from gay to grave, and back to gay again, are embarrassing in a world where the rest of us walk by rule. Linda Thorne is all impulse.'

‘Ah!’

‘At the first word of the Doctor’s disappearance, to run off, helter skelter, like a schoolgirl . . . yes, Linda Thorne,’ cried Cassandra, peering round at some person or persons across her shoulder, ‘I am talking of you. Come down and hear all the wicked things I have to say. At the first word of the Doctor’s disappearance to run off like a schoolgirl, taking somebody else’s husband with her! It was atrocious! Who is that behind you, Linda? Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot. Tell Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot, from me, that everything worth looking after on board the *Princess* is found.’

As Cassandra Tighe scored her point, not without a little air of triumph, Linda tripped gaily down into the cabin.

‘We are to have the very finest weather, Miss Tighe, and all the world means to remain on deck. Only, of course, one wants shawls. What! Mrs. Arbuthnot?’

Pausing in her search among the heap of wraps, it would seem that Linda recognised

Dinah's presence with amiable surprise. But Dinah was coldly silent.

'Surely you, of all people, are not going to become a cabin passenger? My dear creature, I have just escaped the quaintest little adventure in the world! But for Miss Tighe's advent, I should have eloped, yes, run clean, straight away, with your husband. We were planning it all out, from a commercial standpoint, as we flew, frantically, along the sand hills after Robbie. Were we not, Miss Tighe?'

'I leave these matters to your own conscience,' was the dry answer. Possibly, Cassandra recollected that the butterflies were not flying very frantically at the moment when she captured them on the starlit dunes. 'If you had run away with Mrs. Arbuthnot's husband, I should have taken good care to run with you. I warned the Doctor of my intentions before I left the *Princess*.'

'It was quite too unselfish, Miss Tighe, and, pecuniarily, most à propos. I possessed five sous in copper (Guernsey currency); Mr. Arbuthnot

was worth something under twenty francs. We should have had to leave our watches at the Mont de Piété, for me, alas! no novel experience, the moment we reached Cherbourg. Things have turned out, under Providence, for the best. Only, I think, I *think*,' admitted Linda, with arch frankness, 'the Doctor rather regrets having to retire into insignificance. If I had not come back, Robbie would have remained the hero of the situation.'

Mrs. Thorne ran through all this in her accustomed little tired, inconsequential way of talking, winding up, finally, with a long and earnest yawn. She then danced up to a strip of mirror at the best lighted end of the cabin and settled herself to the contemplation of her own image with interest. She dabbed her cheeks first with rice powder, then with eau-de-cologne, then with powder again, producing these cosmetics without a show of disguise from a tiny gilt case that hung at her waist-belt. She arranged the folds of her cachemire scarf above her sleek head in a certain Gitana mode,

which, like all good art, gave an idea of unpremeditation, and became her mightily, she pinned a knot of feathery grass, a memento doubtless of the starlit dunes, in her breast.

Easy to predict that Linda Thorne would not be sea-sick to-night! She was warming to the situation, intended to work up her part—everything in human life was a part to Linda Thorne—with spirit.

‘Come up on deck, Mrs. Arbuthnot, will you not? Surely, with your splendid sea-going qualities, you are not going to stop down in this Black Hole of Calcutta?’

‘Mrs. Arbuthnot will come up when I do,’ cried Cassandra, who, with an added pair of spectacles on her nose, was pinning out insects under a lamp. ‘Go your ways, Linda Thorne, wise ones if you can, and leave Mrs. Arbuthnot and me to follow ours.’

‘I would not be wise if I might,’ said Linda, giving an expressive backward glance across her shoulder. ‘If I were wise . . . I should see myself as other people see me.’

And having uttered this, the acutest speech that ever left her lips, away floated Mrs. Thorne, with her powdered cheeks, her cachemires, and her Indian fragrance, from the cabin.

Dinah could hear the languid accents, the little stage laugh (learnt from the stalls), for a good many seconds later. She could distinguish the voices, too, of Gaston, and of Rosie Verschoyle. How heart-whole they all seemed. How frequent was their laughter! What a light time the past hours had been to every one of the party but herself! Gaston's philosophy, thought Dinah, taking an unconscious downward step, might be the true one after all, then. Live while we live! What had she profited by a strain of feeling too tall for the occasion, by the tiptoe attitude, by throwing away gold where a more reasonable member of society would have quietly staked counters?

'Any admittance here?' exclaimed a masculine voice, as an impatient hand pushed back the cabin door. 'Why, Mrs. Arbuthnot, I have been searching for you everywhere. I want

you to come up on deck at once, please, and see a comet. Not a comet really, you know,' Lord Rex went on, looking hard at Dinah's white face. 'Some kind of Japanese fire balloon sent up by the French people. However, it does just as well as one.'

'Yes, my dear Mrs. Arbuthnot, go,' cried old Cassandra, glancing up, over her double spectacles, from her pinning. 'It will take me an hour's work to bring all my specimens straight. And your colour shows you want oxygen. You are right, Lord Rex. Take Mrs. Arbuthnot on deck to see this comet which is not a comet. I shall follow by-and-by.'

And Dinah Arbuthnot obeyed. She did more. Dinah allowed the tips of her cold fingers to rest within Rex Basire's hand as he pioneered her up the cabin stairs into the semi-darkness of the night.

CHAPTER XVI.

WIFE AND HUSBAND.

THE outlook continued promising overhead. The tide was at the right ebb for making Barfleur Point. At an earlier hour than had been hoped for, the friendly Casket lights showed, at intervals, above the starboard bow of the *Princess*. The skipper, cheerful of voice, promised his passengers that in forty minutes more—tide and weather remaining favourable—the vessel would be lying well to leeward of Alderney.

All this time Dinah had found no opportunity for exchanging a conciliatory word with her husband. She felt that Gaston did not so much avoid as ignore her. He always contrived to be deep in talk with some other

person when his wife sought to draw near him. He did not address her, did not recognise her presence. At length, abruptly, just as Dinah was nerving herself to make some desperate first advance, Mr. Arbuthnot crossed the deck. He came up to the spot where she and Rex Basire stood together. With the pleasantest air imaginable he put his hand under Dinah's arm.

‘Suppose you take a turn with me, wife?’ Mr. Arbuthnot made the proposal in his pleasantest tone, Rex Basire listening. ‘Do you see that revolving beacon? No, my dear, no! Neither aloft on the funnel, nor in my face, but away, far as you can look, to the right. That beacon marks the Casket Rocks. And there, straight ahead, but without any lights showing, as yet, we are to believe is Alderney. Let us make our way to the fore-castle. We shall have a better view.’

The fore part of the deck was deserted, save by two or three knots of sailors, talking low together in patois French as they watched the

horizon. Gaston and Dinah were practically alone. She felt the heart within her throb uneasily. An icy politeness lay beneath the surface geniality of Gaston Arbuthnot's manner. Dinah was prompt to recognise it.

‘What a long day this has been, Gaston. I shall want no wider experience in respect of yachting picnics.’

‘You are changeable, Dinah. As we walked from Langrune to Luc, it was agreed between us that the day should be considered a success.’

‘A great deal has happened since then,’ exclaimed Dinah, under her breath.

‘Nothing very notable, surely. If I recollect right, I did my duty to the extent of two waltzes in the Luc ball-room, and you, my dear child, had a long, a most amusing and intellectual conversation, I cannot doubt, with Lord Rex Basire, in one of the doorways.’

‘Lord Rex Basire is never amusing when he talks to me.’

‘Then I congratulate you on your pro-

ficiency in seeming amused. It ranks high as a difficult social art, even among veterans.'

'Gaston!' she exclaimed, a new and poignant doubt making itself felt.

'Dinah.'

'I don't know what to think of your tone. Why have you never said a word, never looked at me during all these hours? Are you offended?'

'On the contrary,' retorted Gaston. They were now out of sight, out of earshot of everybody. As he spoke, Arbuthnot withdrew his hand from his wife's arm. 'I am thoroughly your debtor. It was the sense of my indebtedness that made me bring you here. I wished to thank you without an audience, quietly.'

'To thank *me*,' stammered Dinah, in a sort of breathless way. 'For—for——' she broke off, reddening violently.

Gaston watched her. 'For your solicitude, your kindly tact! That idea of despatching the old lady in the scarlet cloak to chaperon me

was boldly original, a fine intuition of wifely vigilance——’

‘Gaston! I never——’

‘Yet scarcely the sort of vigilance that passes current in a commonplace and scoffing world. If you had the smallest spark of humour, Dinah—that missing sense! that one little flaw in your character!—you would see things as the commonplace scoffing world sees them.’

‘Should I?’

‘You would divine that, under no possible circumstances,—really it would be well to remember this for the rest of our mortal lives—under no circumstances can I require an old lady, with or without a scarlet cloak, as my chaperon.’

A different woman to Dinah might here have turned the tables on Gaston Arbuthnot, have stoutly, truthfully disavowed responsibility as to Cassandra Tighe’s movements. Dinah was too transparently honest to defend herself as to the letter, knowing that she had been an accessory in the spirit.

‘When the time was so short—ten minutes more, Gaston, and the *Princess* would have started without you—I felt that my heart must stop. Miss Tighe, any one, could have seen on my face what I suffered.’

‘I have no doubt that “any one” could, and did see it,’ said Gaston Arbuthnot, with grave displeasure. ‘It would not occur to you to make an effort at decent self-control, whatever ridicule you might be bringing upon others. Does it never strike you, Dinah,’ he went on, unjustly, ‘that other women have human sensibilities as well as yourself—Linda Thorne, for instance? She rushed off, poor thing, in the greatest agitation at the first whisper of the Doctor’s disappearance, fearing nothing from Mrs. Grundy, fearing all things for her husband. Was it generous, charitable, do you think, to let your disapprobation be written so that he who ran might read upon your face?’

‘I think,’ said Dinah, faithfully, ‘that Mrs. Thorne felt no agitation whatsoever.’

Gaston also thought so. It was a point he would not commit himself to argue out.

‘There are feelings one must take for granted. Mrs. Thorne did the right thing in refusing to start without her husband. I acted as I judged best in determining to remain by her. That ought to have been enough for you.’

‘Yes. It ought to have been enough.’

Dinah gazed before her at the purplish streak faintly dividing the sea-line from the sky. It grew blurred and tremulous. Her eyes had filled with tears.

‘You had plenty of people to bear you company—Geoffrey, Miss Bartrand. It is unbecoming in you, Dinah, to act like a wayward girl. However matters had turned out about Doctor and Mrs. Thorne, what hardship would there have been in your returning to Guernsey with Geoffrey and without me?’

‘None, none! I was wrong from first to last. All this is my lesson, remember. One cannot get a lesson by heart without a little trouble.’

‘One might learn it without making everybody else absurd,’ persisted Gaston. ‘You asked me why I had never addressed a word to you, never looked in your direction, since we put out to sea. I will tell you why, my dear. I considered you dangerous. I was afraid.’

Dinah lifted up her face. She fixed her truthful and transparent gaze full on Gaston Arbuthnot.

‘I don’t understand you, Gaston. You know I never can understand when you speak with a double meaning.’

‘Well, there was a certain electric look about you, a look prophetic of lightning or thunder showers, for neither of which I am in the mood. You ought to have chosen a husband of more heroic mould, Dinah. There is the truth. A man, like the hero of a lady’s novel,’ observed Mr. Arbuthnot, wittily, ‘always equal to a strained attitude. A man fond of the big primeval human passions—love, hatred, jealousy. But you have married me, and I am afraid you must take me as I am. You must

also, as often as you can—remember this, Dinah—as often as you can, endeavour not to render me ridiculous.’

When Mr. and Mrs. Arbuthnot re-emerged out of the darkness, Gaston’s hand was resting on his wife’s shoulder, Dinah’s face had recovered its calm. It would have taken a keen observer of countenance to guess that a breeze so stiff as the one we know of had just stirred the surface of these two persons’ lives. Was Linda Thorne such an observer?

Linda was standing alone in the gangway, her attitude one of deliberation, when Gaston and his wife came aft. She kept her position, speaking to no one, until Lord Rex, companionless, like herself, had managed to find his way to Dinah’s elbow. Then Linda Thorne made a move. She crossed to the vessel’s side. Resting her hand on the bulwarks, she gazed heavenward. Such good lines as her throat and shoulders possessed were well outlined against the pallid background of sky.

Gaston Arbuthnot followed her before long.

‘We are fortunate, after all our misadventures, are we not? The mate tells me that we have sighted Alderney. It seems likely that we shall get back to Petersport without fog.’

‘And what, may I ask, do you mean by our misadventure?’

There was a ring of sharpness in Linda Thorne’s tone.

‘Ah—what! The moment,’ said Gaston, ‘when gleams of a scarlet cloak first flashed upon one along the sand-dunes seems, to my own consciousness, about the most serious of them.’

‘You are singularly insincere, Mr. Gaston Arbuthnot!’

‘I cannot agree with you, Mrs. Thorne. My worst enemies, on the contrary, have the grace to credit me with a sort of brutal frankness.’

‘And, supposing no scarlet cloak had appeared? You would willingly have been left, a second Robinson Crusoe, on the desert shores of Luc?’

‘The cases are not parallel. Robinson Crusoe had only the society of his man Friday.’

‘And there were no beaux yeux to weep for him! So many years,’ observed Linda, ‘stand between me and the literature of my childhood that I am uncertain about details. But I don’t think one ever heard of a Mrs. Crusoe?’

Gaston knew that he was being laughed at. He kept his temper charmingly.

‘And there is, very decidedly, a Mrs. Arbuthnot. When I think of Dinah, I cannot call Miss Tighe’s advent a misadventure. Poor Dinah has a child’s quick capacity for unhappiness. Her imagination would have conjured up a dozen possible horrors, by sea and land, if I had not returned to her.’

‘That is all so very, very pretty, is it not?’ Linda stooped, as if watching the rush of the sea; Gaston Arbuthnot could not catch the expression of her face. ‘We professional old travellers are toughened and sun-baked out of all rose-water nervousness. Robbie has told you—whom does he not tell?—the story of my

being lost, actually lost, in the Nilgiris? If I were to be mislaid for a fortnight, I really don't believe the Doctor would suffer a moment's uneasiness.'

'And yet you were so cruelly upset by *his* disappearance. The superiority,' apostrophised Gaston, 'of the unselfish sex over ours.'

'I was not only upset by his disappearance,' said Linda, still taking an interest in the waves, 'I am disturbed about him, in my conscience, still. If Doctor Thorne takes the slightest chill to-night, we shall be having the old jungle fever back upon him.'

Gaston sympathised as to this contingency, not, as yet, perceiving the drift of Linda's alarms.

'At Robbie's age one cannot be too prudent. To run into one of these cold Channel fogs might end in something quite too serious. And, although the stars make a pretence at shining,' Linda raised her head with tentative playfulness, 'the enemy is at hand. I feel fog in the air.'

‘The air is clearer than it has been all day. In another three or four hours the sun will have risen. We shall be in Guernsey——’

‘In another twenty minutes we shall be outside Alderney harbour. I was talking matters over, some minutes ago, with Ozanne.’ Linda inspected the white hand, resting on the bulwark, with attention. ‘And he has most good-naturedly consented to let me and Robbie land. By signalling promptly for a boat we shall not detain you *Princess* people five minutes. There is the dearest little primitive hotel in Alderney, close to Maxwell Grimsby’s diggings. You remember my telling you about it?’

Gaston remembered Mrs. Thorne’s telling him about the dearest little primitive hotel.

‘The Doctor will have a good night’s rest to recruit his strength, and to-morrow afternoon, if the day is warm, we shall make our way back to our home and infant by the Cherbourg steamer.’

Now Maxwell Grimsby, a gunner by pro-
VOL. II. S

fession, a painter by love, was one of Gaston Arbuthnot's best artist friends—best, too, in the higher acceptance of the elastic word. Grimsby was no manufacturer of prettiness, no amateur idler. Did not a series of beach studies bearing the well-known initials 'M. G.' testify to the world how diligently this very summer's enforced imprisonment in Alderney was put to use? During the past fortnight Gaston had constantly vacillated in his intention of looking up his friend, for ever declaring how much better work a man might do on the grand old rock, yonder, than disturbed by the hundred distractions of pleasant, idle, sociable, little Sarnia—never starting, for ever wishing he were gone! Here was occasion to his hand, a chance of looking up Grimsby without even the preliminary trouble of packing one's port-manteau!

'Of course you could not come with us,' asserted Linda, in her little undertone of mockery. 'Mrs. Arbuthnot is such a child! She would conjure up a dozen possible horrors

if you were to be absent from her so long.'

'I am not sure that deserting the *Princess* would be a courteous action to our hosts,' said Gaston Arbuthnot, hesitating under the first touch of temptation.

'You are made of poorer stuff than your cousin,' thought Linda, glancing, for a second, at his handsome face. 'To gain a victory over Monsieur Geoffrey would be to gain a victory indeed.' Then, aloud—'If we were to carry away any of the younger people I should feel it treason to desert the *Princess*,' she observed. 'I would not go, indeed, if Robbie and I were wanted as chaperons. Considering the existence of Mrs. Verschoyle and Miss Tighe—in talking of chaperons, Mr. Arbuthnot, you and I must never forget Miss Tighe—I think Doctor and Mrs. Thorne may very well be spared. For you it is different.'

'In what way?' asked Gaston, wincing inwardly under her sarcasms.

'Oh, different, altogether. Too much de-

pend upon your presence. Pray do not think of such a revolutionary proceeding as taking flight. You would never be allow— I mean, I am sure you would not find it advantageous to run away. What messages do you send to Mr. Grimsby?’

‘None.’

‘That is severe. You do not believe in my delivering them intact?’

‘I mean to deliver them myself.’

Linda Thorne laughed incredulously. ‘I wish I could make an enormous wager at this thrilling juncture,’ she remarked with persistence. ‘Come, Mr. Arbuthnot. Will you bet me a single pair of gloves that you will be . . . that you will quit the *Princess* when we do?’

‘It would be betting on a certainty,’ said Gaston. ‘My mind is made up. I am really glad of the chance of seeing old Max.’

‘You have told me something of the kind already. You refused a wager I offered you last Monday afternoon, because it would have

been "betting on a certainty." And yet, as the event proved, I should have won.'

'The event will prove that you do not win now.'

There was more than a threat of impatience in Gaston Arbuthnot's voice.

'And you do accept my bet, then? You do stake a pair of gloves that you are—that you will land at Alderney with Robbie and myself?'

'If you are bent upon giving me a pair of gloves, Mrs. Thorne—iron-grey, seven and a-half—I shall accept them with pleasure.'

'Done! The bargain is concluded. My number, as you know, is six and a quarter, Jouvin's best. I wear eight buttons. And now,' added Linda, preparing to move away, 'I must find our hosts, and make excuses. Had I not better offer them on your behalf, too?'

'You are too kind to me, Mrs. Thorne. I think I have just courage enough to pull through the emergency, unassisted.'

Lord Rex was still lingering in Dinah's neighbourhood when Linda tripped airily across to the gangway, Gaston Arbuthnot following her.

'Doctor Thorne and I have to thank you, all, for quite one of the most perfect excursions in the world. I shall put a mark against the subalterns' picnic,' said Linda, diplomatically. 'It has been one of the true red-letter days of my life.'

'Don't talk of the picnic as over, Mrs. Thorne. The subalterns look forward to some hours more of your society, even without the promised fog.'

'Ah, that terrible fog! I must confess, the word makes me nervous, for the Doctor's sake. A fog, you know, means damp—that constant bugbear to us old East Indians.'

'But the voyage is half over. Here we are, almost, in Alderney harbour.'

'And here, I am afraid, my husband and I ought to bid you all good-night. Captain Ozanne has offered to signal for a boat. We

should not delay the *Princess* five minutes. Really and truly, Lord Rex, I think the wisest course will be for Doctor Thorne to land.'

'Doctor Thorne to land? Another mysterious disappearance! And shall you, Mrs. Thorne, immediately follow suit, as you did at Luc?'

'Of course I shall! The whole Luc comedy will be repeated.' And here Linda's voice grew intentionally clear and resonant. 'The Luc comedy, with the original cast and decorations, for everybody's amusement.'

It was a wantonly cruel speech—Dinah Arbuthnot stood within hearing! Yet Linda Thorne's conscience was void of offence. She belonged by temperament to the irresponsible class of mortals who can never resist the temptation of histrionic effect. For what, save histrionic effect, had she cajoled the skipper, the old Doctor, Gaston, into this freak of midnight disembarcation? And when once a woman's tongue and actions are ruled by the eternal desire for smart dramatic point, it must be clear

that other women's sufferings will pay the price of her success.

Dinah's heart froze. She divined, without going through any distinct process of reason, what announcement she was likely to hear next.

'If the Luc scene is to be repeated, I conclude you, too, are going to desert us?'

Lord Rex Basire addressed himself to Gaston Arbuthnot.

'Well, it has been borne in upon one during the last fortnight that it was a duty to look up old Grimsby,' began Gaston. 'And this——'

'And this is duty made easy. Go, my dear fellow, if you have had enough of us,' cried Lord Rex, lightly. 'But go on one condition—that you do not take Mrs. Arbuthnot. Mrs. Arbuthnot is our chaperon-in-chief. We cannot spare her.'

'Mrs. Arbuthnot has Miss Bartrand under her charge—have you not, Dinah? I am afraid you could scarcely——'

'I should, under no circumstances, think of

landing at Alderney,' said Dinah, in a voice uncomfortably strange to Gaston's ear. 'I am not afraid of fog. I do not wish to see Mr. Maxwell Grimsby. Why should I leave the *Princess*?'

'Where your presence is the life of the whole party,' pleaded Lord Rex. 'You must not let your husband persuade you into throwing us over, Mrs. Arbuthnot.'

Quietly, firmly, came Dinah's answer:

'You need not be afraid. There is no risk of my being persuaded, Lord Rex. I am a great deal too wise,' she added, 'to go away from people who care to have me.'

And no further word of explanation or of farewell was exchanged between Dinah and her husband. Into the irrevocable mistakes of life is it not singular how men and women constantly drift after this blind, automatic fashion?

Only at the last moment, when the *Princess* had slackened speed, when the boat that had been signalled for was fast approaching from Alderney harbour—only at this last moment, I

say, Gaston addressed a remark to Geff which Dinah felt might be taken by her, if she chose.

‘I shall be back to-morrow, unless anything very unforeseen happens. If it does, I can telegraph for my portmanteau, and——’

Geoffrey whispered a word or two in his cousin’s ear. ‘Of course, of course. I have every intention of coming back. I merely said “if.” You will have a magnificent passage,’ added Gaston, shaking hands heartily with Lord Rex. ‘Duty takes me to old Max. Inclination would have kept me with my hosts on board the *Princess*.’

Despite the neat turning of this speech, away Mr. Arbuthnot and the Thornes went,—Linda, with her cachemires, her bouquets of wild flowers, her fears for Robbie, her wafted kisses to her friends, creating little theatrical sensations to the last. The boat was visible for a few seconds only, so swiftly did the *Princess* again get under way. There was a profuse waving of handkerchiefs. ‘Good-night, every one!’ rang cheerily across the water in Gaston

Arbuthnot's voice. And then Dinah awakened to the knowledge that she was forsaken, this time by no accident, but of cold-blooded, determined forethought—forsaken, with all the world to see, with Lord Rex Basire persistently talking, as though nothing of moment had happened, at her elbow.

CHAPTER XVII

ROSE-WATER SOCIALISM.

DINAH did not turn from him. Nay, although her brain was in a whirl, although her voice was not under command, although her heart was bursting, Dinah's lips smiled. She was monosyllabic, Lord Rex felt, but monosyllabic with a difference. And eager to improve the scantiest, most meagre encouragement, he began instantly to ransack such memory and imagination as were his for pertinent subject-matter.

Frothy small-talk, personal compliments, local gossip, were little relished, as he had proved, by Dinah Arbuthnot. She did not read newspaper trials, had never opened a society journal, knew nothing about actors or actresses, or novels, or prime ministers, or

popular divines. You could not get her even to talk about herself. But then, that face of hers! If one might, quietly, stand gazing at her surpassing fairness as one does at a canvas or a marble, Lord Rex Basire, on this summer night, would have asked nothing more. His duties as a host, however, the sense that others might construe his silence into deficiency of wit, forced upon him articulate speech.

‘Awful hole, Alderney, for an idle man! Now I was stationed there for three months and got through an awful lot of work. No good letting circumstances beat you. I coloured a meerschaum first rate—worked at it, morning, noon, and night. I taught two of my terriers to march on hind legs, while I whistled the “Marseillaise.” Favourite tune of mine, the “Marseillaise.”’

‘So your lordship has told me.’

Dinah thought of their first conversation at the rose-show.

‘I loathe classic music—loathe everything, in art and literature, but what I can understand.

Ever seen Maxwell Grimsby's Alderney sketches, by-the-by? Dab of greenish-grey for the sea. Dab of bluish-grey for the clouds —Storms, Sunsets, Whirlwinds, things you may as well frame upside down as straight, if you choose.'

No, Dinah had never seen them.

'Maxwell Grimsby's an old friend, isn't he, of Arbuthnot's? That accounts for your husband throwing over all us people on board the *Princess*.'

To this there was no answer. The balls had, certainly, not broken well as regarded Alderney. Clearing his throat twice, after a more redoubtable pause than heretofore, Lord Rex at length sought a wild and sudden refuge in English politics. He had never in his life talked politics to a pretty woman, reserving his views, which were of the rose-water socialistic school, for after-dinner eloquence among his brother subs. So desperately new an experience as Dinah required desperate measures! To talk well above this young person's head,

thought Lord Rex, who held no mean opinion of his own intellect, might awe her into appreciation. And the subject he chose for his experiment was that of class inequality.

The emptiness of all titles, the folly of all social pre-eminence, were themes on which Lord Rex waxed hot, exceedingly. Perhaps he was sincere. Rose-water socialism, I must admit, did not sit without a certain grace on this sunburnt little dandy, a grace to which his slinged arm, shot through in the forlorn defence of English Empire, gave the added zest of piquancy.

Dinah unthawed at once. She broke into talk. In the matter of class differences, Gaston Arbuthnot's wife held fixed opinions, and could express them incisively. But her ideas were not Lord Rex Basire's ideas. Lord Rex had got a vast deal of rabid rhetoric by heart, very picturesque rhetoric in its way, and coming from the lips of a duke's son, Dinah had sharp, clear knowledge, gained at first hand, through the vicissitudes of her own marriage. To Lord

Rex social inequality was a party question—kind of thing, don't you know, that, vehemently taken up, may sometimes land a man, with a following, in the House! To Dinah it was the hidden enemy, the impalpable barrier that stood between her and her husband's heart. Lord Rex had learnt pages of showy axioms to demonstrate that social inequality should never exist. Dinah's life was one long, irrefragable, stubborn proof that it existed.

‘Your remarks have a terribly Conservative flavour, Mrs. Arbuthnot.’ When they had talked for some considerable time he told her this. ‘Impossible you can be a Conservative in reality?’

‘Gaston calls me an old-fashioned Whig. I don't know the meaning of the word. I only pretend to understand these things in the humblest way, from my own standpoint.’

‘But you are in favour of the nationalisation of the land? You would do away with the laws of primogeniture? You don't think a few thousand loiterers, slave-drivers, should

hold big estates—for their pheasants—because each elder son, let him be fool, knave, or coward, is heir to them?’

‘Without such laws where would our English families be, my lord, our barons, and earls, and great dukes, like your father?’

‘Oh, where they came from,’ said Lord Rex, disposing of the question jauntily. ‘Labour was the original purchase-money paid for all things. You believe that much, at least, Mrs. Arbuthnot?’

‘If the succession law was swept away we might lose more than we can afford along with it.’ Dinah had heard ultra-revolutionary notions freely aired at times among Gaston’s friends, and, in her one-sided feminine way, had striven, over her cross-stitch, to think them out. ‘I, for one, should not like to see any church or chapel in England turned into a lecture place for these new unbelievers.’

‘Unbelievers! Oh, that is quite a different story. We began by talking about the folly of class differences.’

Dinah was silent awhile. Then : ' It would be impossible for you and me to think alike on all this,' she told her companion, with a grave smile. ' You have seen so much of the world, Lord Rex, perhaps have heard the debates in the Houses of Parliament? '

Lord Rex confessed that this intellectual advantage had befallen him.

' And I have just watched the lives, the manners of a few more or less troubled men and women. Class differences, as you call them, may be folly. They are the hardest facts I know, the . . . '

Dinah saved herself, just in time, from adding, ' the cruellest. '

' Beauty is the universal leveller,' observed Lord Rex, with presence of mind. ' A perfectly beautiful woman would grace the steps of any throne in Europe. '

' Leave thrones alone, Lord Rex Basire ! If the beautiful woman wanted to make others happy, she would have most chance to do so in her own class of life. '

‘And suppose the beautiful woman wanted to be happy herself, Mrs. Arbuthnot?’

‘Happiness comes naturally if you see it on the faces of the people round you.’

Their politics had not taken the turn Lord Rex desired. He harked back, a little abruptly, upon his first premises.

‘Yes, I am for absolute equality, Gardener Adam and his wife, and that style of thing. I would make the shopkeeping capitalist, just as much as the bloated aristocrat, turn over a fresh leaf. If I ever marry,’ said Lord Rex Basire—‘don’t feel at all like marrying at present, but if I ever do—I hope to get for my wife some simple little village barbarian who has never been to a ball, never heard an opera, never seen a racecourse in her life!’

‘A village barbarian—of what station?’ asked Dinah Arbuthnot.

‘Matter of blank indifference. I should marry the girl, not her station.’

‘And afterwards? Would the barbarian

be accepted by your family? Or would you accept hers? Or would you, both, give up society?’

‘That would suit me best! Give up society. United to the woman one adored,’ said Lord Rex with fervour, ‘what could one want with artificial pleasures, with the eternal bore of dinners and dances?’

Dinah gave a chill laugh. She remembered the days when Gaston Arbuthnot was wont to use the like phrases, as a preface (so, in her present jealous misery, she thought) to returning to the world and its pleasures, unhampered by a wife.

‘When you marry, my lord,’ she observed, distantly, ‘you will, if you act wisely, choose some duke’s or earl’s daughter for your wife. Give up that notion of the village barbarian. As time wore on, and . . . and the truth of things grew clear, the duke’s daughter would, at least, understand you. There could be no discoveries for her to make.’

Lord Rex turned and faced Dinah Arbuth-

not, good humouredly ignoring the coldness of her bearing towards himself.

‘Your opinions are desperately mixed, Mrs. Arbuthnot. You may be Conservative in theory—you would be a staunch Republican in practice! I am afraid, now, that a man with the misfortune—I mean, you know,’ stammered Lord Rex, lowering his voice, ‘that you could never bring yourself to care, ever so little, for a man with any wretched sort of handle to his name.’

‘I beg your pardon, my lord?’

‘A man belonging to the most useless class of all—the class that so many of us who are in it would gladly see done away with! Such a man would never find favour in your sight?’

‘Would have found, do you mean, when I was a girl of seventeen?’ Dinah asked in tones of ice. ‘I can give no answer to that. Girls’ hearts are moved by such trifles—a title, even, might turn the balance. But I and my sisters lived in a little Devonshire village. We saw nothing whatever of high folks, and——’

‘I am not talking of Devonshire villages!’ exclaimed Lord Rex, interrupting her hastily, but dropping his voice still lower. ‘I am not talking of the time when you were seventeen—I mean now.’

Dinah recoiled from him on the instant. Idle compliments had moved her, at length, to an extent Lord Rex dreamed not of. For she could not forget that this was all part of her lesson, that her companion was making speeches such as better born women, careless mothers, wives of the type of Linda Thorne, might just listen lightly to, parry, and forget. With the thought came a thought of Gaston. A flood of shame tingled in her cheeks.

‘You ask me questions beyond my understanding, Lord Rex.’ So after a strong effort of will she brought herself to speak. ‘My choice was made, happily, long ago. How could any man but Gaston find favour in my sight?’

Now Lord Rex Basire, his tender years notwithstanding, had seen plenty of good femi-

nine acting, of the kind which dispenses with footlights and the critics, the acting required in the large shifting comedy of human life. Although his own delicacy was not extreme, or his perception sensitive, some unspoiled fibre in his heart vibrated, responsive to the honesty of Dinah's voice. This woman acted not, could never act! Her fealty to her light, neglectful husband was part of herself. Duty and happiness for Dinah were simply exchangeable terms. She could taste of the one only in the fulfilment of the other.

'That was very charmingly expressed, Mrs. Arbuthnot. I hope, when I marry, my wife will say the same pretty things of me, if I deserve them, which I shall not! Characters like mine don't reform.'

'There will be more chance of reformation if you marry than if you don't—especially if you choose the duke's daughter,' added Dinah, stiffly, 'not the barbarian.'

'And without any marrying at all! If some woman, as good as she is fair, would hold

out her hand to me in friendship, would let me think that I held a place rather lower than a favourite dog or horse would hold in her regard ! If—if—ah, Mrs. Arbuthnot ! if *you*——’

But Lord Rex speedily discovered that he was apostrophising the waves and the stars. At the moment when his eloquence waxed warmest, Dinah Arbuthnot, village barbarian that she was, had walked away, without one syllable of excuse, from his lordship’s side.

He watched the outlines of her figure as long as they were discernible through the gloom ; then, drawing forth his vesuvians and tobacco pouch, prepared to smoke a lonely pipe of wisdom on the bridge. Lord Rex was in a fever of perplexity. Until the last five days he had never cared for living mortal but himself. His brief fealties to the prettiest face of the hour, Rosie Verschoyle’s among the number, had been so many offerings at the shrine of small personal vanity. All this was over. His surrender to Dinah’s nobler beauty,

his recognition of Dinah's pure and upright nature, had roused him thoroughly out of self, made him look searchingly at the aims, the pleasures of life, and acknowledge that there were human affections, human fidelities, high above the range of his own light and worldly experience. Did happiness thrive in that loftier, chill atmosphere? Was Gaston Arbuthnot to be congratulated, wholly, on his lot?

One thing was certain—so Rex Basire decided, as he betook himself gloomily to the bridge. However this drama of domestic life might end, it would be monstrous, impossible, that he, Rex Basire, should be peremptorily dismissed therefrom, dismissed as one occasionally sees the frustrated stage villain, long before the final falling of the curtain!

‘And even if it is so,’ mused Lord Rex half aloud, and drawing upon reminiscences of Nap. in his ill-humour, ‘if no choice lies before one but to “accept misery,” misery let it be! The man who goes blue does not invariably

find himself in the worst position at the end of the game.'

But the lad's philosophy was lip-deep only. Lord Rex Basire had never felt less cynically indifferent to loss and gain than in this hour.

CHAPTER XVIII.

CLOSE TO PORT.

THE short June night drew to its close, and still the weather continued fair. The sky was full of stars, a solitary lambent planet quivered in the east. By the time the moon had sunk, with pale metallic glow, above the motionless Channel, a welcome point of fire was visible over the starboard bow of the vessel—the beacon of Castle Cornet lighthouse.

A little flutter ran through the groups of expectant people keeping watch together upon the deck of the *Princess*. It was well to have got back safely, and without fog. And still, whispered the younger ones regretfully, the most delightful picnic in the world had come to an end, all too soon! Even Mrs. Ver-

schoyle, emerging with salts-bottle, with chattering teeth, from the cabin, conceded that, for a yachting expedition, and although L'Ancrese Common would have been a thousand times more reasonable, their misadventures had been few. How comforting, murmured the poor lady, with a shudder, if it were not for the cold—this curiously increasing cold—to keep one's eyes on the familiar harbour light, to realise that in another hour and a half at latest, they would be all warm and asleep in their beds!

But the cold increased still, and, for a mid-summer night, was undoubtedly no common cold. It found its way through plaids and waterproofs, it got down throats, it caused fingers to become numbed. The mate was seen to button up his pilot jacket as he made his way with precipitate haste to the men on watch, the skipper moved from one foot to the other as he stood consulting his compass. Both skipper and mate glanced anxiously ahead, towards the west, where no horizon showed.

‘ One would scarcely have expected the stars

to set so suddenly,' observed Mrs. Verschoyle. In this lady's youth it is probable that school-girls did not, as now, learn the exact sciences. 'But depend upon it, the captain knows his way. The sailors are taking precautions, I heard the steward say so downstairs, by using the lead. And I remarked that they were seeing most attentively to the small boats. Besides, I have heard more than one gun fired. No sound so reassuring at sea as the report of a gun! A skilled old mariner like Ozanne would not be dependent on anything so chancy as the stars.'

'But, mamma, the harbour lighthouse has set, too,' cried Rosie Verschoyle, who stood shivering at her mother's side. 'Everything is setting. I don't see our own funnel. I don't see the flower in your bonnet as clearly as I did two minutes ago.'

'I wish you would talk soberly, child. You know how much I dislike this kind of ill-timed chaff. Who ever heard of a lighthouse setting?' observed Mrs. Verschoyle, with

melancholy common sense, 'and why does the *Princess* go so slow? The skipper, no doubt, has his reasons, still he might remember we are not all as fond of the sea as he is. I was never less nervous in my life, and—Sailor! Sailor!' Mrs. Verschoyle flung herself before a figure, wrapped up in tarpaulin, crowned by a sou'-wester which loomed with gigantic proportions through the thick air. 'Would you say, if you please, why the steamer goes so slow? And are we in danger—off our track or anything? And why does one seem all at once to lose sight of Castle Cornet lighthouse?'

The sailor was a weatherbeaten old Guernseyman, possessing about twelve words of Anglo-Saxon in his vocabulary. Mrs. Verschoyle, however, in her agonised desire for truth, stretched her arms forth in the direction of the vanished red light. She also articulated the words Castle Cornet with tolerable distinctness. Her meaning had made itself clear.

The answer, proceeding from the depths of a gruff, tobaccoey throat, was incisive:

‘Brouillard!’

And brouillard it proved, clammy, ice-cold, yellow, after the manner of all mid-Channel fogs. At first every one affected to take this reverse of fortune as a jest, the little bit of mock danger that was needed to point a moral to the preceding day’s enjoyment. So providential, said the ladies, in a pious but quavering chorus, that the *Princess* lay close on shore before the fog grew thick. The skipper’s duty, clearly, was to make straight for St. Peter’s harbour and land them. Only, why lose time? Why steam so slowly? What object could Captain Ozanne have in exposing them to this mortal cold a moment longer than was needful?

Mrs. Verschoyle, after a few minutes’ suspense, voted for independent action. She had, indeed, broached a project of creeping up to the men at the wheel and imploring them to ‘turn faster,’ when there came a general stir among the crew, followed by a rattling sound which most of the party had sufficient sea-going

experience to recognise. The *Princess* was about to cast her anchor.

Just at this juncture appeared Lord Rex, fresh from hurried consultations with Ozanne and the boatswain. A suspicious unconcern was on Lord Rex Basire's face, a note of forced cheerfulness in his tone.

'Lucky we have got so near home, is it not, Mrs. Verschoyle? We are about two miles from shore, they say—Ozanne, of course, knows every yard of water—just within or without the *Grunes*, whatever the *Grunes* may mean. We shall only have to ride half an hour or so at anchor—awfully jolly sensation, I can tell you, with a south-west swell. And then, as the mist rises, we shall steam clean into Petersport.'

But this show of jauntiness misled no one. The 'de Carterets, Cassandra Tighe, Marjorie Bartrand, all understood their position better than did Lord Rex. And it was a position of the utmost gravity. The *Princess* was lying in dense fog, surrounded by shoals, across the

very highway of the Channel night steamers. For an old and wary seaman like Ozanne to have been forced to anchor at such a strait did but render the fact of his helplessness more pointed.

‘What does it all mean? Are we not close to port, madam?’

The ladies were pressing together in groups. Dinah whispered the question across Cassandra Tighe’s shoulder.

‘Close to port—of one kind or another,’ answered Cassandra, vaguely unorthodox to the last. ‘As long as nothing runs into us we may do well enough. And dawn is at hand. At sunrise the fog may lift. Your husband ought to be here with you,’ she added, misinterpreting a certain vibration of Dinah’s voice.

‘I thank God that he is not! Alone, there is nothing to be frightened about. I thank God that Gaston is safe—warmly housed, away in Alderney!’

And, in truth, a reasonless, half-pleasurable

excitement, the reaction after so much dull pain, had arisen in Dinah's heart.

That a dark 'Perhaps' lay straight and immediately before them, became at each moment more plain. The continued firing of guns gave token that other vessels were in the same plight as the *Princess*—once, indeed, a steamer drifted so close that they could see the faint reflection of her signal lamps, could hear the beating of her gong. The dreary sound of the fog-horn, the muffled tramp of the men on watch, the lights burning aloft in the ship's rigging, the partially lowered boats, the solemn faces of the skipper and the crew, all combined into one unspoken word—Danger.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.

S. & H.

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